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In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

Germany...Berlin's Olympiastadion is lit up with the colours of the newly-unveiled Euro 2024 logo

Portugal...players of the Afghanistan women's national team train on the outskirts of Lisbon, having been forced to flee their home country

South Africa...fans return to stadiums in South Africa for the first in 18 months, to watch Bafana Bafana beat Ethiopia 1-0 in a World Cup qualifier

Colombia...Neymar and Yerry Mina go head-to-head during Colombia's World Cup qualifier v Brazil in Barranquilla

Switzerland...Cristiano Ronaldo checks on a steward after striking her with a ball while warming up for Manchester United's clash against Young Boys

France...fans of Lens invade the pitch during their side's Ligue 1 clash against Lille

Argentina...supporters of River Plate celebrate their team's 2-1 victory over Buenos Aires arch-rivals Boca Juniors

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

Statistics can never fully encapsulate the magic of a footballer's talents; the way they moved, the joy they brought to fans, or the influence they had on the game. Still, when discussing players who were at the peak of their powers before the prevalence of TV cameras, sometimes it's the best we can do. And the numbers behind the career of Jimmy Greaves are truly astonishing: 44 goals in just 57 England caps; a record 357 English top-flight goals; Tottenham's record scorer, with 266 goals, and 132 in just 169 games for Chelsea. Without doubt, the stats don't lie: Greaves was one of the most gifted forwards this country has ever produced.

Fortunately though, we don't have to rely on just numbers: Keir Radnedge bore witness to Greaves' career and, following the legendary forward's recent death, pays fitting tribute to it on page 46.

Without doubt, the stats don't lie: Greaves was one of the most gifted forwards this country has ever produced

Strikers remain a theme throughout this issue. Following his explosive start to life at Roma, Tammy Abraham's story is told by Nick Bidwell on page 38; Oluwashina Okeleji assesses Kelechi Iheanacho's remarkable journey and impressive year on page 50, and Robert Lewandowski sits down with *World Soccer* after collecting his European Golden Shoe award for the 2020-21 season on page 56.

As usual we have the regular round-up of remarkable stories from around the world – from Sheriff Tiraspol and their incredible Champions League run (page 22), to Ghanaian side Hearts of Oak and their double-winning campaign (page 30), as well as Brazil's dominance of South America's club competitions (page 82) – plus loads more.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

Sold...Newcastle supporters celebrate the club's takeover

ENGLAND

Amnesty International object to Newcastle United takeover

The Premier League has been urged to update its owners' and directors' test by Amnesty International, following the approval of the Saudi Arabian-backed takeover of Newcastle United.

The £300 million deal was approved on the basis that the offer is from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), as opposed to the state itself – even though the country's leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman also chairs the PIF.

Bin Salman has been accused of ordering the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 – a claim that he denies – while Saudi Arabia's record on gay rights, capital punishment and freedom of expression has also been heavily questioned.

"The phrase 'human rights' doesn't even appear in the owners' and directors' test, despite English football supposedly adhering to FIFA standards," said Amnesty International's chief executive, Sacha Deshmukh, in a statement.

"We can understand that this will be seen as a great day by many Newcastle United fans. But it's also a very worrying day for anyone who cares about the ownership of English football clubs and whether these great clubs are being used to sportswash human rights abuse.

"In our assessment, this deal was always more about sportswashing than it was about football, with Saudi Arabia's aggressive move into sport as a vehicle for image-management and PR plain for all to see," Deshmukh added.

"It was a great player, Dirk Kuyt, who said there is no place in the Champions League for Sheriff. So I'm very happy to destroy his perfect world"

Sheriff Tiraspol coach Yuriy Vernydub after his side shock Real Madrid in the Champions League

EUROPE & SOUTH AMERICA

Intercontinental play-off agreed

UEFA and CONMEBOL have agreed to stage a one-off clash between their respective continental champions, Italy and Argentina.

While the exact date and venue are yet to be confirmed, the fixture will take place in June 2022. The initial agreement will see three editions of the game played, with the potential for more if they prove successful.

The two confederations are seeking closer ties as they stand against FIFA's proposals for a biennial World Cup (more on page 14).

EUROPE

Ballon d'Or shortlists revealed

France Football has unveiled the nominees for its 2021 annuals awards, with the winners unveiled on November 29:

Ballon d'Or 2021 nominees:
Cesar Azpilicueta, Nicolo Barella, Karim Benzema, Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini, Kevin De Bruyne, Ruben Dias, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Bruno Fernandes, Phil Foden, Erling Haaland, Jorginho, Harry Kane, N'Golo Kante, Simon Kjaer, Robert Lewandowski, Romelu Lukaku, Riyad Mahrez, Lautaro Martinez, Kylian Mbappe, Lionel Messi, Luka Modric, Gerard Moreno, Mason Mount, Neymar, Pedri, Cristiano Ronaldo, Mohamed Salah, Raheem Sterling, Luis Suarez.

Ballon d'Or Feminin 2021 nominees:
Stina Blackstenius, Kadidiatou Diani, Christiane Endler, Magdalena Eriksson, Jessie Fleming, Pernille Harder, Jennifer Hermoso, Marie-Antoinette Katoto, Sam Kerr, Fran Kirby, Ashley Lawrence, Lieke Martens, Sam Mewis, Vivianne Miedema, Sandra Panos, Irene Paredes, Alexia Putellas, Wendie Renard, Christine Sinclair, Ellen White.

Kopa Trophy 2021 nominees:
Jude Bellingham, Jeremy Doku, Ryan Gravenberch, Mason Greenwood, Nuno Mendes, Jamal Musiala, Pedri, Giovanni Reyna, Bukayo Saka, Florian Wirtz.

Yashin Trophy 2021 nominees:
Thibaut Courtois, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Ederson, Samir Handanovic, Emiliano Martinez, Edouard Mendy, Keylor Navas, Manuel Neuer, Jan Oblak, Kasper Schmeichel.

HEROES & VILLAINS

Team-mates... Kimmich and Goretzka

JOSHUA KIMMICH & LEON GORETZKA

In March, the Bayern Munich and Germany midfield duo established the WeKickCorona campaign, which has donated over €6 million to organisations including food banks, hospitals, homeless charities and blood donation services. Their latest donation of €500,000 to UNICEF is in support of the United Nations Children's Fund, which aims to help provide vaccines to the world's poorest countries.

FARA WILLIAMS

The former England midfielder of 172 caps became the first inductee into the Women's Super League Hall of Fame. Set up to mark the league's ten-year anniversary, the honour recognised Williams' status as one of the country's most gifted female players, overcoming homelessness to become the most capped English footballer ever.

FREIBURG

The Bundesliga side's new stadium, which they moved into in October, is set to be one of the greenest in the world, with the potential to be carbon neutral. The 34,700-seater SC-Stadion has solar panels on the roof, generating 2.3 million kWh per year, and will be heated by energy generated from a nearby manufacturing plant. The ground also offers electric car charging stations and over 3,000 parking spaces for bikes.

MESUT OZIL

The Fenerbahce midfielder recently launched a football development centre for South Asians in the UK. Recent research revealed that British Asians make up seven per cent of the overall UK population, but just 0.25 per cent of footballers. "Why are we not seeing more [Asian] players or managers breaking into professional football?" said Ozil. "I hope the Football for Peace Mesut Ozil Centre will become the platform they need."

WILLIAM RIBEIRO

The Sport Club Sao Paulo player has been charged with attempted murder after kicking a referee Rodrigo Crivellaro in the head. "I don't really remember [what happened]," Crivellaro told a local radio station after being discharged from hospital. "My refereeing colleagues told me that I gave him a yellow card. He punched me in the face, I fell to the ground, got kicked, and passed out."

PINI ZAHAVI

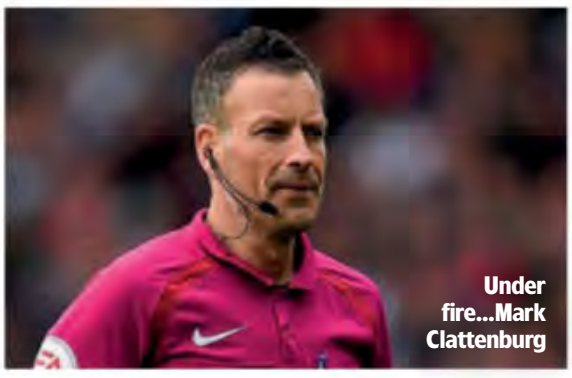
One of football's most prominent agents, Zahavi has been indicted for forgery, use of forgery, fraud and money laundering. The Israeli, who has worked with the likes of Neymar, David Alaba and Thomas Tuchel, was accused amidst investigations into Belgian club Mouscron, which he bought in 2015 and sold a year later. He denies all charges.

RONNIE BRUNSWIJK

The 60-year-old owner of Surinamese side Inter Moengotapoe chose the biggest game in the club's history – a round of 16 clash with Olimpia in the CONCACAF League – as the moment to make his professional football debut. Brunswijk played nearly an hour of the 6-0 defeat, and was later recorded handing out cash in the visitors' dressing room and left wearing an Olimpia shirt. Both clubs were subsequently disqualified from the competition.

MARK CLATTENBURG

The former Premier League referee came under fire for his comments on female referees in an interview with *talkSPORT*. "The problem with women is...they have a difficult pathway if they get pregnant during their refereeing career," said Clattenburg. "Do they want to be pregnant or do they want to be referees?" The organisation Women In Football described Clattenburg's comments as "lazy" and "outdated".



Under fire...Mark Clattenburg

"I think [Qatar] is my last World Cup. I see it as my last because I don't know if I have the strength of mind to deal with football anymore"

Brazil megastar Neymar casts doubt over his international future

GAVI

(Barcelona)

The Barcelona midfielder went into Spain's UEFA Nations League semi-final clash with Italy with just 276 La Liga minutes to his name, but the class and maturity that he played with suggested otherwise. Aged 17 years and 62 days, he became Spain's youngster-ever international.

The game marked a remarkably swift rise for the teenager, who had only played two league games for Barca B before the start of this season, and yet is already being described as a future midfield lynchpin for both club and country. "He is the future of the national team, like many other players, but he also showed he is part of the present," said Spain coach Luis Enrique. "It's not normal that he plays like that [at 17]...he plays like he's at school or in his garden at home."

D'Margio WRIGHT-PHILLIPS
(Stoke City)
As the son of Shaun Wright-Phillips and grandson of Ian Wright, the 20-year-old has stellar footballing genes. Recently scored his first goal for Stoke's Under-23s.

Lucas ZELARAYAN
(Columbus Crew)
An MLS star of the last five years, the Argentina-born attacking midfielder accepted a call-up for Armenia – for whom he qualifies through his father – and made his debut in October.

Rafael LEAO
(Milan)
Not only has the 22-year-old forward starred in Milan's promising start to the season, he also impressed on debut for Portugal in October's internationals.

Dusan VLAHOVIC
(Fiorentina)
The prolific Serbia striker had already attracted many admiring glances, and now looks certain for a big move after rejecting a contract offer from Fiorentina.

Andoni IRAOLA
(Rayo Vallecano)
Having taken Rayo into La Liga via last season's Segunda play-offs, the Basque coach has the team flying high in La Liga, with the help of veterans Radamel Falcao and Oscar Trejo.

Kaide GORDON
(Liverpool)
The highly-rated winger signed his first professional contract shortly after turning 17, having made his senior debut against Norwich City in the EFL Cup in September.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Don't let the big boys take away Champions League upsets

Happy surprises in the first two rounds of Champions League group matches were cheered to the core by an avidly watching world. The delight of Young Boys beating Manchester United was followed by delirious wonder when Sheriff Tiraspol won away to Real Madrid. Just as impressive were the displays of Club Brugge in having much the better of a draw with Paris Saint-Germain and then claiming victory on the road at RB Leipzig.

Football fans relish tales of the unexpected, and they know these could not have happened in the European Super League proposed by 12 major clubs – an idea still being pursued by three of them despite fierce backlash from supporters across the continent.

Young Boys, Sheriff and Brugge are the kind of opponents the historic elite consider to be irrelevant and worthless, the kind forever to be excluded from the Super League. Allow a team from Moldova to play against us? What a joke, they thought. What's the point?

Do the giants know better now? Of course not. They despise the uncertainty of such mild shocks. Real Madrid and Juventus, in particular, remain insistent in their desire to forge ahead with the creation of an exclusive Super League, and they keep saying so openly amid widespread derision.

Madrid's president Florentino Perez is adamant that only his precious Super League can "save football." They are weasel words. What concerns him is putting a steel fence around Real's dominant position in the game. What he really means is "protect my club".

Andrea Agnelli, the president of Juventus, has been equally vocal in his defiance, and equally preposterous in his claims about "guaranteeing the stability of football".

Upset...Sheriff Tiraspol celebrate their winning goal at the Bernabeu

In a letter to Juventus shareholders he said: "The post-COVID world belongs to Generation Z, people between the ages of 12 and 21" – implying clearly enough that the wishes of everyone else can be brusquely ignored. Think of it. If you are aged 22, 32 or 42, you are going to live for most of the rest of the 21st century, but your opinions on the future of football have zero value.

Then came more nonsense dressed up as profound intelligence. Agnelli claimed that with a Super League there should be a "focus on the performances of clubs in European competitions and how they contribute to the developing of talent as core elements in a new concept of sporting meritocracy (something that cannot solely be based on geopolitical and commercial considerations that should be kept separate to the essence of the sport itself)."

One phrase immediately leaps out from the flimflam: "a new concept of sporting meritocracy."

> Young Boys, Sheriff and Brugge are the kind of opponents the historic elite consider to be irrelevant and worthless, the kind forever to be excluded from the Super League

It sounds suspiciously like a break from the only true concept of sporting meritocracy: the one where every club has the chance to rise from grassroots to the Champions League if they are good enough, if they merit progress by their performance on the pitch.

That is what Young Boys and Sheriff have achieved, playing with courage, nerve and skill against historic giants, giving the Super League plotters the bloody nose they deserve and proving that European club football's most prestigious tournament must remain properly open to all comers.

Agnelli's "new concept of sporting merit", never mind those impossibly important geopolitical considerations, wouldn't allow mere minnows on the pitch against Juventus – not today, not even when Generation Z are sitting by the fireside telling their grandchildren how crazy the world was in 2021.

It is an outrage to see Perez and Agnelli still campaigning for their craven Super League. It is bad enough that they may force alterations to the current excellent format by gaining access merely on grounds of historic success.

Eternal vigilance is required against these supremely selfish owners. They need to know that we enjoy watching the likes of Sheriff win at the Bernabeu.

Keir RADNEDGE
THE INSIDER

Football's calendar needs a rethink – but can FIFA deliver one that works for all?

Wild words are being thrown around: that the world governing body is more interested in "monetising" or "weaponising" the debate around a new, updated, improved international match calendar. That calendar should work equally for everyone but the evidence from a debate kicked off at FIFA Congress last May is that some sectors are more equal than others.

Everyone accepts that an improved calendar is needed. Whether that demands wholesale reform of the size and shape of international competitions – such as the World Cup which funds FIFA – is a different matter. Suspicions about the direction of travel have been exacerbated by FIFA's rush to an indicative decision as early as December.

Why the hurry? The right answer is a matter of urgency. But more haste, less speed.

In any case the current process ignores the fact that the calendar – IMC in populist shorthand – evolved through force of circumstance, accident and only occasional rays of common sense.

For example, up until the end of the 1950s the annual duels in the old British Home Championship between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were played on a Saturday afternoon at the same time as the regular league programme. Hence Tottenham, Manchester United, Burnley, Arsenal and other powers of the day played on without their stars, who were absent on international duty.

Alan Hardaker, the tough old secretary of the Football League, guarded his kingdom with jealous ferocity. He even opposed midweek football, prohibiting Chelsea from entering the inaugural European Champions Cup in 1955-56. Hardaker and the FA also tried to bar Manchester United from Europe the next year but Matt Busby defied them.

Only then, when Hardaker saw the potential of floodlit football, did he devise the Football League Cup for midweek domestic competition. Hence England remains one of the few major European nations with three, rather than two, domestic club competitions.

International friendlies, back then, had been played either on end-of-season tours or in the afternoon in midweek – England v Hungary, famously, in 1953 but also, notably, England's 4-2 victory over a Spain side featuring Alfredo Di Stefano, Luis Suarez (the original) and Paco Gento in the December mud in 1960.

Sir Alf Ramsey complained that his 1966 World Cup preparations needed England to clear the club calendar, like continental rivals, for big matches. Hence clubs affected by star call-ups were allowed to postpone matches as English football, reluctantly, fell in line with the rest of the world.

England was not unique in suffering Club v Country warfare. Up until the mid-1970s South American nations such as Argentina and Uruguay went to World Cups without key players refused release by their Brazilian clubs.

Only after the presidential advent of Brazilian Joao Havelange in 1974 did FIFA throw its weight around to insist on World Cup priority. By this time UEFA, after taking over the old independent Fairs Cup in 1971, had also finally co-ordinated midweek dates for its own club competitions.

No consideration existed for African or Asian competitions, largely because few Africans or Asians played in Europe whose clubs endured tight restrictions on foreign players.

The financial importance of international football, plus the free-for-all sparked by the 1995 Bosman Verdict, brought tensions to boiling point. Thus Sepp Blatter, on being

Arsene Wenger... leading FIFA's campaign for biennial World Cups

> The current football calendar evolved through force of circumstance, accident and only occasional rays of common sense

elected FIFA president in 1998, employed Michel Platini as "football counsellor" to set down a formal match calendar.

Back then, the two men were allies. Platini had headed the organising committee for the 1998 World Cup in France and supported Blatter, against Europe's own Lennart Johansson, in the FIFA election. Ultimately politics and money poisoned the relationship but initially Platini delivered the goods.

The calendar was one of the few positives of Blatter's early years as FIFA president and, with minor adjustments, remains the skeleton on which UEFA, CONMEBOL, CAF and the rest append the flesh and blood of their club and national team competitions.

Some objections were raised: by clubs and their coaches, resenting national team call-ups, and also by the few players' unions with a voice loud enough to rail – in vain – against the ever-increasing physical and mental pressures on footballers. Players and their agents kept silent, of course; the higher their profile, the greater their sponsorship value.

Gianni Infantino, during his tenure as general secretary of UEFA, saw the arguments from both sides. Hence his move, on becoming FIFA supremo in 2016, to adjust the IMC to suit his own corporate ambitions. Initially that meant trying to discard the unloved Confederations Cup and Club World Cup to free up space for an expanded, month-long, club championship (yet to see the light of day). That made a full-blown reconstruction of the calendar essential.

Since FIFA imposes the calendar it believes it should frame the terms to suit its own needs, both political and financial. This is the crux of the matter.

As already mentioned, the calendar should be a neutral vehicle, balancing the game's national team and club competitions, the needs of leagues and clubs plus player welfare, and all in the context of the world's multifarious climatic and geographical stages laced with a massive imbalance between nations great and small.

Then add in the opinions and self-interest of broadcasters, sponsors, advertisers, supporters and – not to be ignored – other sports which dance around football's periphery.

No small challenge. Just throw it all into a computer and await the printout, surely? Not so simple, especially when FIFA itself is not applying the principle of fair play.

Congress approved a feasibility study into staging both the men's and women's World Cups every two years. FIFA has subsequently thrown its own weight behind that concept: its "legends" brigade of golden oldies (the Brazilian Ronaldo & Co) has been wheeled out in support.

A press release trumpeted a fans' survey said to back a World Cup every two years. In fact the press release was a disgrace: the hidden figures revealed a majority of fans in favour of the status quo.

Many medium and small FAs believe, naively, that a World Cup every two years will mean twice the size of their FIFA cash handouts.

At the end of September FIFA staged a four-hour virtual summit to poll its 211 member associations. They heard development director Arsene Wenger explain his proposal: a World Cup every two years, the regional championships every four years in-between and all national team qualifying matches played in international break months of October and March.

Presumably, Infantino's pet project of an expanded Club World Cup would fit into the other summer slot.

This block bookings proposal may appear logical. But does the game want logic or the intermixed excitement and variety of the current country/club mix-up? How do the clubs view losing two entire months in each half of the season?

Wenger described the plan as "an audacious proposal for the future of men's football." He added: "It follows four main principles, namely regrouping national team qualifying matches, reducing travel for players, creating more space for meaningful matches and final tournaments, and ensuring a mandatory rest period for players between seasons."

Believe that "rest period" if you like.

Infantino and Wenger have other tricks up their sleeve such as an annual Under-17 tournament for 48 teams, and a biennial U20 tournament for 24 teams or, alternatively, annual U16 and U18 tournaments for 48 teams and a biennial U20 tournament for 24 teams.

Makes your head spin.

Most federations will also like the fact that they will need FIFA to provide all the funding since youth tournaments guarantee only heavy losses. Maybe it's a fall-back in case the biennual World Cup falls.

Either way, the game demands better than the sight of its governing bodies kicking the calendar around like a political football.

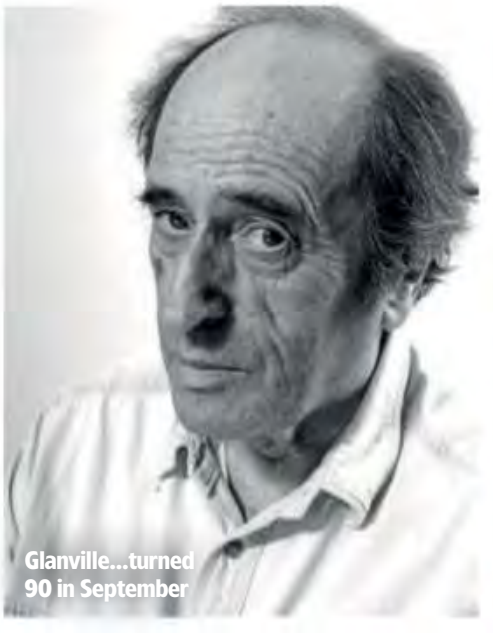
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, BRIAN!

An admiring colleague once said: "There are two kinds of football writer: those who have been influenced by Brian Glanville and those who should have been." Glanville, who began writing his trenchant columns for *World Soccer* back in the magazine's infancy in 1961, recently celebrated his 90th birthday.

His long career has been written as novelist, raconteur, stage and screenwriter as well as an educator in the application of perspective, perception and a sometimes caustic wit to the field of football criticism.

Above all else he has been the observer who opened countless eyes to the wonders of the worldwide game.

Happy birthday, Brian!



Glanville...turned 90 in September

BOOKS THIS MONTH

ALWAYS BELIEVE
By Olivier Giroud with Dominique Rouch (Pitch Publishing, £19.99)

Join the former Chelsea and Arsenal striker on a remarkable journey, winning the title with Montpellier and trophies in England, before lifting the 2018 World Cup with France. But what about all the sacrifices he's made along the way, and coping with constant criticism around his selection for the national side? Usually a private person, the Milan star holds nothing back as he shares the highs and lows of a stellar career in a gripping autobiography.

'71/'72, FOOTBALL'S GREATEST SEASON?
By Daniel Abrahams (Pitch Publishing, £16.99)

There was a season when the world's best footballers were all on show at British grounds. Best, Keegan, Charlton and Moore were joined by Beckenbauer, Pele, Cruyff and Eusebio, while in the dugouts Clough, Shankly, Revie and Allison duked it out in the closest ever title race. Back in 1971/72 the game was played for the public not TV companies, players shared pints with fans, Roy Race ruled the comic world and videprinters saw football devotees hold their collective breath every weekend.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The Manchester derby: a system-less striker against a striker-less system

In their Champions League meeting in September, with Paris Saint-Germain's midfield sitting very deep and their forward line barely bothering to track back, Manchester City repeatedly got the ball in space about 40 yards from their opponents' goal. With a front three of Riyad Mahrez, Raheem Sterling and Jack Grealish, they kept trying to pass and dribble their way through, and kept running into a wall off Idrissa Gueye, Marco Verratti and Ander Herrera. If only, the thought occurred, they'd had a proper striker to whom they could have slung in a couple of crosses.

Five days later, City went to Anfield to face Premier League title rivals Liverpool. The issue was less stark, but there were a number of occasions on which Phil Foden got in behind James Milner, but then had nobody to cross to. Grealish, that day, was the notional centre-forward, but neither he nor anybody else was making the bursts into the box that a more natural No.9 would have done.

Even the previous Saturday, as City had produced one of the greatest displays of pressing the Premier League has known in a 1-0 win over Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, it was hard to avoid the thought that with a striker they might have had the game wrapped up by half-time, rather than fretting that for all their dominance they could end up paying for their wastefulness in front of goal. In five games away from the Etihad before the draw at Anfield, including the Community Shield, City had scored just twice – and that despite having the xG advantage in all those games.

All of which would seem to boil down to the conclusion that they should have splashed out on Harry Kane in the summer – assuming they could have got the full Kane, and not the weirdly off-kilter version of the first two months of the season.

But football is not as simple as that. If City had signed a centre-forward, could they have played in the way they did against Chelsea? Would it have been possible for them to exercise such control over midfield? Pep Guardiola's football probably needs the central striker to drop deep into midfield to be an extra man, creating space for others to break into. But to get that level of control, to have that mastery of position and possession, there is a price to be paid, and that is in not having a No.9 to haunt the box.

He has never really been able to function with a typical striker. The signing of Zlatan Ibrahimovic at Barcelona was a huge failure – which, for all that there was a personality clash, was also an issue of tactics. Barca under Guardiola were at their best with Samuel Eto'o, David Villa and Pedro operating wide and Lionel Messi playing as a false nine. At Bayern, Guardiola was fortunate to have Robert Lewandowski, an extremely rare instance of a high-class striker who is also capable of pulling wide and dropping deep.

> United have prioritised a celebrity goalscorer over the system

ABOVE and BELOW: summer signings... United and City's new recruits

Even with Sergio Aguero at City, relations were strained.

And yet City were clearly aware of the problem of a lack of firepower (despite winning the Premier League as top goalscorers last season with Aguero starting only seven games). There was substance to their interest in Cristiano Ronaldo. That may be baffling (how on earth could a Guardiola side have functioned with a central striker who presses so little?) but it does highlight concerns about the lack of cutting edge.

United, meanwhile, have gone the other way, prioritising a celebrity goalscorer over the system. For those inclined to be sympathetic to Ronaldo, snatching him from City was a move that started superbly, as he scored five goals in his first five games. The problem is, in none of them did United play well: they lost to Young Boys and Aston Villa, were extremely fortunate against West Ham United and Villarreal, and were very open even against Newcastle United, who could have caused real problems with a little more self-belief and composure in the final third.

Particularly against Villarreal, there was a sense of Ronaldo getting United out of jail. That is the benefit he brings. Even in a game in which the midfield is falling apart and the right-back is constantly being left exposed, he can pounce on a half-chance to burgle a goal. In a crapshoot, Ronaldo does weight the dice in your favour. But the question is whether a major club attempting to play modern football should be getting itself involved in crapshoots. Shouldn't it be able to exercise more control to remove as much randomness as possible?

November's Manchester derby is a clash of a centre-forward in search of a system and a system in search of a centre-forward. Perhaps it is simply a matter of balance. Control without cutting edge can be frustrating, which in turn can become debilitating if players lose faith in the system; but still, a method and a structure is surely preferable to a reliance on one individual.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Water in hand... Mattia Destro

1 WATER WONDERGOAL

If you haven't seen Mattia Destro's goal for Genoa in their 3-3 Serie A draw with Verona, it's worth taking a look on YouTube – and not just because of the striker's sublime turn and chipped finish. The outstanding goal was made all the more impressive by the fact that he was holding a bottle of water in one hand, having taken a drink just before the action restarted. He then celebrated by chucking the bottle into the home fans behind the goal.

2 "NUTS"

Animals interrupting matches has been a staple feature of this column, with dogs the most frequent offenders. One pup in Bosnia took things to another level, however, in a recent Bosnian Premier League clash between Sloboda and Posuje. Not content with just running onto the pitch, it even got its teeth on the ball, and dribbled it through the legs of one of the visiting players. The dog's attempts to take on the whole team was interrupted when a substitute picked it up and carried it off the pitch.

3 WOLVES RECORDS

From dogs to Wolves: Wolverhampton Wanderers have completed a Premier League first by launching their own record label. Wolves Records, the result of a partnership between the club and Warner Music UK, will aim to support talent in the Midlands area, such as S-X, a singer-songwriter, producer, and fan of the team. "This is not just about supporting local artists, but a genuine and authentic move by a football club with a vast audience to penetrate the music industry," said label boss Ricky Hill. In 2020, Ligue 1 side Marseille also launched their own label for hip hop, rap and R&B.

4 TYPO TROUBLE

Professionals often say that there is a right way and a wrong way to lose a game – and Tarbes' exit from the French Cup would certainly belong in the latter category. The sixth-tier side were expelled from the competition after arriving 50 minutes late for their clash with Vabres-L'Abbaye – having first driven to Vabre, over 90 kilometres away – due to a sat nav typo. Thanks to the error, the hosts progressed to the fifth round without having to kick a ball.

5 SUPER SOAKING

AFC Fylde were forced to apologise after a number of their academy players soaked a family with water pistols. "We would like to extend our apologies to the family affected and will continue to educate our students on their behaviour and responsibilities in the community," said the National League North club in a statement. "AFC Fylde Football Club does not condone this type of behaviour and has banned the students involved from this week's games." The apology came just weeks after the club were criticised for posting a job advert described as "discriminatory" during an online backlash. The social media post has since been deleted.

6 FIRE PANTS

October's derby clash between Saint-Etienne and Lyon was expected to be a fiery occasion, with away supporters not even allowed to travel to the game. Yet that didn't stop the home fans from getting themselves into trouble anyway: one Saint-Etienne supporter was arrested by police after he was found to have hidden two flares down his boxers.

Fiery atmosphere... Saint-Etienne v Lyon

Tom SAINTFIET

GUEST COLUMNIST

My first AFCON was stolen, but now I'll have a team there

In the first of a series of guest columns, Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet reflects on the draw for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations, which kicks off in January.

To be in Yaounde for my first Africa Cup of Nations draw in August was such an exciting time as a coach.

I should have been at the draw four years ago for the 2017 AFCON; I was coaching Togo and after four of the six matches, we had seven points. That was the same number of points as Gambia had this time around and I was certain that Togo would qualify.

All we had to do was take four points from Djibouti and Liberia. With great respect to both countries, Togo had a good enough team to do that but the president of Togo intervened. Not the president of the Togo FA, but the president of the whole country.

Faure Gnassingbe wanted a French coach because France was helping fund a harbour project, so Claude Le Roy stole my first AFCON. But Togo only got one point from three matches in Gabon and finished bottom of their group.

This time I have been able to take a team all the way to the finals, but we will not make any grand claims about what we can achieve. We are here for experience and playing at Gambia's first AFCON will certainly be that.

In Cameroon they have great stadia that are perfect for the AFCON, and we were made very welcome, but as for the hotels and infrastructure there I am not so sure. At the draw, we could not get internet access at our hotel and had to walk a few hundred metres to the Hilton Hotel, where the tournament officials were to use their Wi-Fi and get back in touch with the world.

I did not see as many hotels of the standard that I would expect for a tournament like the AFCON. Some teams have a four-hour round trip just to the training ground or the stadium. Other countries are also concerned about their hotels, like Malawi and Zimbabwe, who will stay at Bafoussam in the Bamboutos Mountains in western Cameroon.

AFCON 2021... the draw took place in August

The tournament has been delayed twice, first because of the climate in June, and then due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But it's important that for the biggest tournament in Africa you visit the countries with a really big football background, like Cameroon.

At the draw, Gambia were in Pot 4 as we were the worst-ranked FIFA team to ever qualify for the AFCON. We lost a bit of excitement as it was never really a surprise who we were drawn with as we were last. But it was still good to see the big names coming out of the pot and know we would not play them.

In Pot 1, all the countries are strong, as you'd expect, and champions Algeria would have been very tough, even though we played them twice in 2018 and 2019 and drew both games.

Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon would also have been tough but we drew Tunisia. They were at the last World Cup and will be strong, but Tunisia were not one of the countries that I wanted to avoid.

Coaching...Saintfiet addresses his players

THE DRAW

Group A
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Ethiopia

Group B
Guinea
Malawi
Senegal
Zimbabwe

Group C
Comoros
Gabon
Ghana
Morocco

Group D
Egypt
Guinea-Bissau
Nigeria
Sudan

Group E
Algeria
Equatorial Guinea
Ivory Coast
Sierra Leone

Group F
Gambia
Mali
Mauritania
Tunisia

In Pot 2, there were also countries we wanted to avoid. Egypt, Ghana and Ivory Coast are all strong and I would rather have played Mali, Burkina Faso or Guinea. We got Mali and I was relaxed.

The side we wanted to avoid in Pot 3 was Gabon. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is a fantastic player and the whole team is strong for Pot 3. And everyone knows the story of how Aubameyang and the Gabon team had to sleep on the floor at Banjul before we played them in an AFCON qualifier last November.

If we drew Gabon, that would have increased the tension. I would rather have drawn Sierra Leone, and I was quite relaxed to draw Mauritania, who are only playing at their second AFCON.

Part of me wanted to play Cameroon so we would be based in Yaounde and take the road that they followed to go as far as possible. Instead, we will go to Limbe, which is a seaside city in the English-speaking part of southwest Cameroon. First you fly to Douala, then it's two hours by bus and there will be high security there, but the people will make us feel very welcome.

I know the people in Limbe will ask us what our ambition is and I always say that we are here to learn. Within the team we will discuss targets, but it's the Gambia's first tournament and I hope that it will also not be our last.

Tom Saintfiet was speaking to Steve Menary

ESM XI
EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich)	3
Ederson (Manchester City)	2
Edouard Mendy (Chelsea)	2
Bono (Sevilla)	1
Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)	1
Gianluigi Donnarumma (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Mike Maignan (Milan)	1
Jan Oblak (Atletico Madrid)	1
David Ospina (Napoli)	1

DEFENDERS

Achraf Hakimi (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Kalidou Koulibaly (Napoli)	8
Ruben Dias (Manchester City)	5
Alphonso Davies (Bayern Munich)	4
Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool)	4
Joao Cancelo (Manchester City)	3
Marquinhos (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Marcos Alonso (Chelsea)	2
Thiago Silva (Chelsea)	2
Trent Alexander-Arnold (Liverpool)	1
Cesar Azpilicueta (Chelsea)	1
Leonardo Bonucci (Juventus)	1
Aritz Elustondo (Real Sociedad)	1
Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Theo Hernandez (Milan)	1
Benjamin Pavard (Bayern Munich)	1
Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea)	1
Milan Skriniar (Internazionale)	1
Jean-Clair Todibo (Nice)	1
Lucas Verissimo (Benfica)	1
Kyle Walker (Manchester City)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich)	8
Nicolo Barella (Internazionale)	4
Idrissa Gueye (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United)	2
Jorginho (Chelsea)	2
Florian Wirtz (Bayer Leverkusen)	2
Ismael Bennacer (Milan)	1
Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City)	1
Fabian (Napoli)	1
Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich)	1
Ander Herrera (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	1
Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich)	1
Christopher Nkunku (RB Leipzig)	1
Dimitri Payet (Marseille)	1
Paul Pogba (Manchester United)	1
Bernardo Silva (Manchester City)	1
Hans Vanaken (Club Brugge)	1
Axel Witsel (Borussia Dortmund)	1

FORWARDS

Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)	9
Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	7
Erling Haaland (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	4
Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)	4
Karim Adeyemi (Red Bull Salzburg)	2
Sebastien Haller (Ajax)	2
Romelu Lukaku (Chelsea)	2
Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich)	2
Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)	2
Ciro Immobile (Lazio)	1
Lorenzo Insigne (Napoli)	1
Kylian Mbappe (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Victor Osimhen (Napoli)	1

ESM MEMBERS: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Germany), *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Italy), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *Sport Express* (Russia), *Sport/Foot* (Belgium), *De Telegraaf* (Netherlands), *TIPS Bladet* (Denmark), *ElfVoetbal* (Netherlands), *World Soccer* (England)

"Jimmy was a wonderful footballer; the best goalscorer to ever play...you'd be irritated he'd not touched the ball and then, bang, it was in the back of the net. He was the best I've ever seen"

Former Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Alan Mullery pays tribute to Jimmy Greaves

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Ranieri...Watford's 15th manager in the last ten years

EUROPE

Watford appointed **CLAUDIO RANIERI** as manager, shortly after firing Xisco Munoz from the post. The Italian coach made his first signing just days later, capturing Cameroon defender **NICOLAS NKOULOU** on a free transfer following his release by Torino.

In the Championship, Nottingham Forest appointed **STEVE COOPER** as boss after Chris Hughton was sacked following a poor start to the season.

In Spain, former Watford manager **QUIQUE SANCHEZ FLORES** returned to Getafe to replace Michel.

In Italy, Milan signed free agent goalkeeper **ANTONIO MIRANTE** after an injury to No.1 Mike Maignan, Venezia captured former Manchester United and Argentina goalkeeper **SERGIO ROMERO**, and Spezia snapped up **AURELIEN NGUIAMBA** after he left Ligue 2 side Nancy in the summer.

Villarreal signed Ivory Coast right-back **SERGE AURIER** following his release by Tottenham Hotspur.

Former Monaco defender **JEMERSON** joined Metz after a short spell with Corinthians in his home country of Brazil.

Former Milan prodigy **MBAYE NIANG** completed a free transfer to Bordeaux following his release by Rennes.

AFRICA

STEVEN CAULKER, who won one England cap in 2012, received a call-up to represent Sierra Leone.

ASIA

Qatari side Al Rayyan completed the signings of midfielders **JAMES RODRIGUEZ** from Everton and **STEVEN NZONZI** from Roma.

Unveiling...Steven Nzonzi with his new coach Laurent Blanc

Former England striker **DANIEL STURRIDGE** joined A-League side Perth Glory – his first club since receiving a ban for breaching betting rules in March 2020 – while Newcastle Jets signed Spanish midfielder **MARIO ARQUES**.

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

Retiring...Samir Nasri

EUROPE

Former France, Marseille, Arsenal and Manchester City midfielder **SAMIR NASRI** retired from playing.

English National League side Barnet sacked manager **HARRY KEWELL**.

SOUTH AMERICA

Despite ending a nine-year trophy drought by winning the Paulista state title in May, Sao Paulo parted ways with head coach **HERNAN CRESPO**. He was replaced by club legend and former goalkeeper **ROGERIO CENI**.

CONCACAF

Major League Soccer side FC Cincinnati sacked coach **JAAP STAM**.

On his way...Jaap Stam leaves Cincinnati

OBITUARIES

Roger HUNT
(1938-2021)

Roger Hunt was not only one of England's 1966 World Cup winners, but Liverpool's record league marksman with an unrivalled 244 goals between 1958 and December 1969. His death leaves only Sir Geoff Hurst, Sir Bobby Charlton and George Cohen from the Wembley-winning line-up.

Hunt, born in Golborne, Cheshire, was signed by then-manager Phil Taylor from non-league Stockton Heath, but his career took off under Bill Shankly's revival of the Reds, which lifted them out of the old Second Division in 1962. His goals were crucial to success in the league in 1964 and 1966, and the FA Cup in between.

Beyond Merseyside Hunt will always be honoured for leading England's attack in the 1966 World Cup finals. He scored 18 goals in 34 appearances for England after making his debut in 1962 under Walter Winterbottom when still a Second Division player.

With three goals, Hunt was England's top scorer in the World Cup group stage and played every minute of every match – from the opening goalless draw with Uruguay, to the end of extra-time in the 4-2 victory over West Germany in the final at Wembley.

Famously it was Hunt, running in on goal, who turned to celebrate after Geoff Hurst's shot for the controversial third goal struck the underside of the crossbar, fell behind the line and ricocheted out. Hurst has always said it was Hunt's reaction that convinced him about the validity of the goal.

Hunt, hailed as "Sir Roger" on the Kop, scored the first goal shown on the opening edition of BBC TV's Match of the Day Saturday highlights programme in 1964, in a 3-2 win over Arsenal.

Keir Radnedge

Len ASHURST
(1939-2021)

After a playing career that saw him break Sunderland's appearance record, Ashurst went on to enjoy a long managerial career. As Newport County manager, he not only took the team into the Third Division, but also the quarter-finals of the European Cup Winners' Cup, having won the

"He's second to no one in his importance in the history of Liverpool. To be the goalscoring catalyst of the Shankly team…puts him in a bracket of LFC legends who are responsible for making us the club we are today"

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp pays his respects to Reds legend Roger Hunt

Liverpool legend… Roger Hunt

Welsh Cup in 1980. Although he later returned to Sunderland, and took them to their first League Cup final, he was sacked after their relegation from the First Division. In 2014 he was inducted into the LMA Hall of Fame.

Jimmy GREAVES
(1940–2021)

Prolific… Jimmy Greaves

The death of Jimmy Greaves united three old London rivals along with all the rest of English football in mourning.

Greaves starred for Chelsea and Tottenham, either side of a brief spell with Milan, and then West Ham before increasing disenchantment prompted his retirement at only 31 in 1971. His club honours with Tottenham included the FA Cup in 1962 and 1967, plus the now-defunct European Cup Winners' Cup in 1963.

At international level Greaves notably missed the 1966 World Cup final victory over West Germany because of injury. Either side of that bittersweet day he scored 44 goals in 57 internationals between 1959 and 1967 and remains England's fourth-highest marksman. His six international hat-tricks are also still an England record.

Greaves was a prolific marksman at club level. He scored on his debuts for all of his senior clubs, and is not only Spurs' record goalscorer (266) but also the highest scorer in the history of English top-flight football, with 357. He was the old First Division's top scorer on six occasions and was honoured, belatedly, with the award of an MBE in 2021.

By then Greaves had overcome a battle with alcohol and won millions of new admirers for his good-natured TV work, including his Saint and Greavsie partnership with former Liverpool forward Ian St John. He is survived by wife Irene, sons Danny and Andrew and daughters Lynn and Mitzi. *(Appreciation, page 46)*

Keir Radnedge

Palace legend… Terry Long

Cornel DRAGUSIN
(1926–2021)

In an extraordinary 40-year coaching career, Dragusin established himself as a quietly influential figure in Romanian football. After a series of spells managing and coaching both Steaua and Progresul Bucharest, he was recruited by the Romanian Football Federation to work with the senior team and the Under-23s, and went to the 1990 World Cup as assistant manager, before becoming director of the country's coaching school until 2002. Also managed Iraq and Syria in Asia.

Terry LONG
(1934–2021)

A Crystal Palace legend, having spent 15 years at the club after joining from non-league Wycombe Wanderers, and going on to make a then-record 480 appearances – a tally that has only been surpassed once since. Long was involved in several promotions and relegations for the Eagles, meaning that he holds the distinction of playing in four different leagues for the club – although never the top flight. Retired in 1970, remaining at the club as a coach for three years.

Bernard TAPIE
(1943–2021)

Tributes…Marseille supporters flocked to the Stade Velodrome for Tapie's funeral

A colourful French businessman and politician, Tapie had a reputation as a ruthless, asset-stripping businessman.

In 1986 he bought Olympique Marseille, winning four league titles, two French Cups and, most significantly, the Champions League in 1993. Within days of the 1-0 win over Milan, however, it emerged that the club had tried to "buy" a league game against Valenciennes the previous weekend.

Tapie and general manager Jean-Pierre Bernes had contacted Valenciennes' players and asked them to underperform so that Marseille could have the title wrapped up – and have their players remain injury-free and fresh – ahead of the Champions League final. Yet one of the players contacted, Jacques Glassmann, blew the whistle – a decision that later earned him a FIFA Fair Play Award.

Marseille were stripped of their French league title, punished with relegation and barred from defending the European crown, while Tapie received a prison sentence for his role in the match-fixing scandal.

On his release from prison in July 1997, Tapie created a new persona as an actor and radio and television host. He then became a media mogul after buying *La Provence* and associated titles in 2012.

In spite of his misdeeds, by making Marseille the first – and, to date, only – French side to win the Champions League, Tapie will always be well remembered at the Stade Velodrome – as demonstrated by the tributes that have been paid to him by the club.

Sheriff Tiraspol

The story behind one of the most remarkable results in Champions League history

Sebastien Thill's tattoo on the back of his left calf muscle depicts the midfielder wearing his No.31 shirt and dreaming of the Champions League trophy.

It was that very muscle that generated the power for an unstoppable strike that sealed arguably the biggest ever upset in the history of Europe's premier club competition; a moment that seemed entirely implausible, but which instantly became iconic.

Thill's strike had ensured that FC Sheriff Tiraspol – the champions of Moldova who were playing in the Champions League group stage for the first time – recorded an astonishing victory at record 13-time competition winners Real Madrid.

Earlier that day, the Spanish giants' salary cap for the season had been recorded at £635 million; approximately 50 times the budget of their Eastern European opponents, who a year ago were eliminated from the Europa League qualification stage by Irish side Dundalk.

Thill plays alongside his brothers Olivier and Vincent at international level for Luxembourg, and the midfielder only joined FC Sheriff this year from Luxembourg-based Progres Niederkorn. His signing was indicative of the club's imaginative and varied recruitment policy which had seen players signed from teams in Niger, Mali, Malawi, Tunisia, Colombia, Slovakia, UAE, and Poland, among others.

In total, 18 nationalities are represented in Sheriff's cosmopolitan squad – including Uzbek winger Jasurbek Yakhshiboev, who opened the scoring in the 2-1 victory in Madrid – which has undergone radical overhaul in the past 12 months amid the club's ambitious plans to break the European barrier.

Recruitment is crucial and constant at a club like Sheriff, where players don't tend to stick around beyond a year or two.

Founded in 1997, the club have won 19 Moldovan National Division titles since and have established a hegemony of success in the nation, but their true ambition was to make their mark on Europe. In 2022, their 25th year, they will likely be playing in the knockout stages of European football.

Having reached the Europa League group stage on four occasions, their Champions League path began on July 7 and saw aggregate victories over teams from Albania and Armenia, before defying the odds to eliminate Red Star Belgrade and Dinamo Zagreb.

The remarkable success continued with a two-goal home victory over Shakhtar Donetsk in their opening group game before triumphing at the Bernabeu; both victories achieved by sitting deep, soaking up pressure and delivering swift, decisive counter-attacks.

Sheriff coach Yuriy Vernydub said in the aftermath of the stunning victory in Madrid: "This is so emotional. I'm very appreciative of my boys for this great job. We are a real team.

Upset...Jasurbek Yakhshiboev heads in Sheriff's first goal at the Bernabeu

Champions League dream...Sebastien Thill's left-leg tattoo

"Some big players said before there's no place in the Champions League for teams like Sheriff, but it's our place and we proved it."

Moldova has one of the lowest GDPs among European nations and, while Sheriff have dominated the football scene since their formation, they do not identify as Moldovan.

They hail from Tiraspol, the city officially recognised by the United Nations as Moldova's second biggest behind Chisinau, the capital, but in reality it is the centre of the autonomous region of the diplomatically unrecognised Transnistria.

Transnistria, known locally as Pridnestrovia, has its own government and is the only state to continue to use the hammer and sickle on its flag – one element of the symbolism that attaches it to the former USSR – but its otherworldliness comes from it not being recognised on maps or holding international relations.

Moldova holds close ethnic relations with Romania, but the population of Transnistria – located in the narrow

Dominant...Sheriff's branding can be found across many businesses in Transnistria

strip of land on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border – is two-thirds of Russian and Ukrainian descent.

Transnistria declared independence from Moldova in 1991 and a vote in 2006 overwhelmingly voted for independence and closer ties to Russia, but neither was recognised in the international community.

The region's currency, the ruble, is unique to Transnistria and cannot be used abroad, while Russian is the official language. A statue of iconic Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin sits outside its parliament.

The region's population stands at 470,000 and has a two-and-a-half-decade long ceasefire with Moldova, with the two co-existing in peace and suggestions that the current set-up benefits those in power.

The normal conventions of doing business seemingly do not apply to Transnistria, with the football club representative of the Sheriff company that has gained a monopoly over profitable private business in the region.

Sheriff hold significant political influence within Transnistria through its links to the Obnovlenie ("Renewal") party and is connected to more than just the football club, with supermarkets, petrol stations, telecommunications, car dealerships, media channels, medical centres, construction companies and hotels among its branded products.

Viktor Gushan and Ilya Kazmaly, believed to have been former KGB officers, founded the club as an arm of the company with the mysterious Gushan the club president.

> "Some big players said before there's no place in the Champions League for teams like Sheriff, but it's our place and we proved it"
>
> Sheriff coach Yuriy Vernydub

Gushan and Kazmaly were self-styled entrepreneurs who amassed significant wealth following the breakup of the USSR due to their connections before building their business empire.

In Sheriff's formative days, the company struck a deal with Transnistria's first president, Igor Smirnov, to allow them to bring food into the region customs-free via a largely unregulated border with Ukraine.

Former Moldovan sports minister Octavian Ticu, leader of the pro-Romanian Party of National Unity, has criticised the company as using the football club as a "weapon of their business" and for ensuring Moldovan football is no longer "fair competition".

Ticu is one of the main critics about the impact of this zone of unregulated economic activity, which has previously only been acknowledged on a largely local basis prior to the football club's remarkable success in European competition this year.

The area has developed a reputation for smuggling, arms trafficking and corruption in its three decades of existence.

Ticu added that the company have "accumulated huge resources of contraband" that has meant that "Sheriff have made an economic empire this way. They have made a monopoly of provisions."

However, Peter Lulenov, a member of Transnistria's football federation, was keen to stress: "Don't confuse the football team with the corporation. They are not the same.

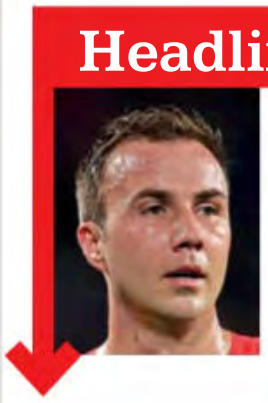
"But everything is connected. Football and economic trade move in parallel and in the same direction."

The team's stunning success and over-performance is not just the story of this European success, but one of the greatest achievements in recent decades.

Ironically, their rise to prominence has prompted greater scrutiny over the club's income streams and ownership structure, which had previously only gained recognition locally.

For players like Thill, it is Sheriff's sporting ambitions and clever recruitment which have heralded a period of sporting achievement that really ensured dreams are coming true.

Colin Millar



Mario Gotze

Germany's 2014 World Cup-winning hero is enjoying a new lease of life in the Eredivisie

Mario Gotze tweeted "the story continues," upon the announcement in September that he had penned a new deal with PSV, extending his unlikely stay at the Philips Stadion into the summer of 2024.

The story of Gotze's career is one that begins like a fairy tale. Breaking through as a teenager at Borussia Dortmund, he established himself as one of Europe's brightest attacking talents, likened to Lionel Messi for his balance and inventiveness.

After helping BVB to two Bundesliga titles and a Champions League final, he joined rivals Bayern Munich in a controversial €37 million deal in 2013. The following summer, the fairy tale reached its apogee as Gotze volleyed home the winning goal in extra-time of the World Cup final and, at the age of 22, wrote his name indelibly into the German national team's rich history.

Since then, Gotze's story has been complicated, to say the least. After struggling to make an impact at Bayern he was sold back to Dortmund in 2016. Back at Signal Iduna Park, health issues (he was diagnosed with myopathy, a muscular disorder) and inconsistent form prevented a glorious homecoming, limiting his inclusion to just 52 Bundesliga starts in four seasons.

Still, when his last Dortmund contract expired in the summer of 2020 and, still only 28, Gotze hit the free-agency market, the strength of his name and the everlasting promise of his raw ability meant he had options, including staying in the German top flight. So his decision to sign for PSV in the Eredivisie was met with surprise and scepticism – in swerving Bundesliga offers, was Gotze accepting his irreversible decline?

"My feeling was that maybe he could look for a more quiet environment, where he could enjoy playing football again," reflected PSV manager Roger Schmidt. "Of course, I knew that we weren't his first option and that he would consider many other offers."

With a goal on his PSV debut – a 3-0 away win at PEC Zwolle last October – Gotze quickly set about proving that any reports of his demise had been exaggerated. In his inaugural season in the Netherlands, the 63-cap World Cup winner turned back the clock, providing six goals and seven assists in all comps and adding cohesion and creativity to a young PSV side who finished a distant second to Ajax in the Eredivisie.

Europa League... Gotze topped the assist charts in mid-October

"It has been a real unexpected transfer," says Rik Elfrink, PSV reporter for newspaper *Eindhovens Dagblad's*. "Nobody believed that a player like Mario Gotze would play here. You can earn much more money elsewhere.

"But they had a good proposal for him and it's close to where he lives. The surrounding is relaxed, calm. I think that is what he likes. He doesn't have to talk all the time about his World Cup-winning goal in 2014. I think that made a big difference. It's now about Mario Gotze, who wants to have success and win prizes with PSV."

In the 2021 Johan Cruyff Shield, Dutch football's traditional curtain raiser, Gotze scored as PSV handed Ajax a 4-0 drubbing, snapping the champions' 17-game unbeaten streak. And the assist he registered in September's 2-2 Europa League draw with Real Sociedad – a game in which he also scored – was a classic of the Gotze genre, seeing the German playmaker at his smooth, skilful best as he sauntered in from the flank, nutmegging an opponent en route to playing through Cody Gakpo to score.

Gotze was named Europa League Player of the Week for his virtuoso display against the Spanish side. He followed that up with a brace of assists in PSV's next continental outing, a 4-1 win at Sturm Graz. And, thanks largely to four successive wins to begin the campaign, Schmidt's side went into October's international break within a point of league leaders Ajax. It is little surprise, then, that PSV moved quickly to tie down Gotze's future beyond the end of the current season.

But while Gotze's Eredivisie excursion has set up his winding career story for some feel-good falling action, the PSV chapter is not yet completely written.

With a goal on his PSV debut – a 3-0 away win at PEC Zwolle last October – Gotze quickly set about proving that any reports of his demise had been exaggerated

"He still has a lot to prove," Elfrink says. "He plays some games where he is really outstanding and you see he has a level that can go higher than PSV.

"But can he still play two matches a week? Can he play every week at the same level? I have doubts, because he has some injuries. It could be that he has to choose his games more in the future."

Ryan Baldi

Stoycho Mladenov & Stanimir Stoilov

The return of two legendary coaches adds intrigue to Sofia clubs CSKA and Levski

The early autumn in Bulgarian football was marked by the return of two coaching stalwarts to the country's most successful clubs. After six years away from the club, Stoycho Mladenov re-joined CSKA Sofia, while Stanimir Stoilov returned to Levski after a 13-year absence.

Mladenov was one of CSKA's key players in the early 1980s, when the club won four league titles in a row. In 1982 they reached the semi-final of the European Cup, beating Liverpool 2-0 after extra-time, with Mladenov scoring both goals. Later he played in Portugal, where he befriended Jose Mourinho. In addition, he won 59 caps for Bulgaria and scored 15 goals, playing at the 1986 World Cup when Bulgaria reached the round of 16 for the first time in their history.

He began his coaching career in Portugal and later managed in Greece, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. His last job was in Kazakhstan, where he won the cup with FC Kaisar in 2019.

Now, he is back in charge of CSKA for the fifth time, almost 20 years after first taking charge in 2002. He won the league in his first season, before repeating the trick in his second term in 2007-08 – CSKA's last title. His third and fourth spells, in 2012-13 and 2013-15, brought no further silverware, while his fifth crack at the job looks to be his toughest assignment so far.

So far, so good. CSKA won six of their first seven league games, drawing the other, leaving them two points behind leaders Ludogorets with a game in hand. In addition, they also qualified for the Europa Conference League, overcoming Latvia's Liepaja, Croatia's Osijek and Czech Republic's Viktoria Plzen to reach a group containing Roma, Zorya Luhansk and Bodo/Glimt.

With 31 league titles, CSKA are the most successful club in Bulgaria, but their current 13-year drought is the longest in their history. As the last man to win the league with the team, the hope is that Mladenov can finally end Ludogorets' dominance.

Meanwhile, over at Levski, Stoilov has been parachuted in with the aim of rekindling some of the magic that he has produced in the past.

Back in the hot seats... Mladenov (left) and Stoilov (right)

As a player he had three periods at the club, winning four league titles and five cups. He was in the team in September 1994, when Levski beat CSKA 7-1 – a record result in the derby. Like Mladenov, he also spent time playing in Portugal, before beginning his coaching career at Levski in 2004.

Stoilov's four years in charge of Levski were the most successful in the club's history. They won two league titles and two Bulgarian Cups – lifting the double in 2006-07 – as well as making their mark on Europe. In 2005-06 they reached the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup and, a year later, became the first Bulgarian side to reach the group stage of the Champions League. As a result, he has taken charge of more European games than any other Bulgarian coach.

> **As the last man to win the league with CSKA Sofia, the hope is that Mladenov can finally end Ludogorets' dominance. At Levski, Stoilov has been parachuted in with the aim of rekindling some of the magic that he has produced in the past**

After leaving Levski in 2008, Stoilov struggled to find a new, permanent home. He has managed Bulgaria twice – though both spells lasted less than two years – while jobs at Litex Lovech, Anorthosis Famagusta in Cyprus, and Botev Plovdiv brought limited success.

In 2014 he took charge of Astana in Kazakhstan, where he was able to repeat his Levski success, winning four league titles in a row and reaching the group stage of the Champions League for the first time in their history. In doing so, he became the only Bulgarian coach to have taken two teams from different countries into the competition.

After such a significant impact, Stoilov was appointed Kazakhstan manager, before leaving in 2019. He had been out of work until this season.

"In my first period in Levski I was football's idealist," he says. "Now I come back in the worst moment for the club. There is one key word – discipline. Not only on the pitch, but by behaviour."

Certainly, the glory years of Stoilov's first spell at the club seem a long way off. Last season they finished ninth in the 14-team Bulgarian top flight; when he returned, they were in the bottom four.

The two coaches crossed paths while they were both working in Kazakhstan, and are now friends. At the end of September, they met in the season's first Eternal Derby – the name for matches between the capital city rivals – 14 years after their last meeting in the fixture in 2007. Although Levski scored first, CSKA cemented their status as Ludogorets' primary challenger at the top of the table with a 2-1 victory.

"There is a coaching rivalry between us, but the result of the match will not influence our friendship," said Stoilov. "I am happy to return to my club and our aim is to win the cup".

Rumen Paytashev

Amir Abdou

The coach of the Comoros will complete a remarkable journey when he takes his team to their first-ever Africa Cup of Nations

The progress of the tiny Comoros Islands to a first-ever Africa Cup of Nations finals appearance in January comes largely on the back of its migrant community in Marseille.

The decision to invite players from Comorian families resident in France turned the fortunes of the small island nation on its head and has culminated in an historic achievement, as they booked their place at the finals in Cameroon with some aplomb – losing only their last qualifier and finishing above Kenya and Togo in their qualifying group.

Integral to the rapid rise has been coach Amir Abdou, also from Marseille, who took up mentoring kids as part of a youth employment scheme when his own playing dreams were cruelly ended by two cruciate knee ligament injuries.

He rose quietly up the ranks of French amateur football, first in Agen and then at Golfech, where he coached the local team to a famous French Cup win in 2013 over third division Luzenac.

It was then he came to the attention of the Comorian federation, who had only started participating in international competition after joining FIFA in 2005. Abdou was invited to serve as assistant to Henri Stambouli, earmarked as the first foreign coach of the team. Abdou jumped at the chance to work with Stambouli, a former Olympique Marseille coach, who had already been in charge of the national teams of Guinea, Mali and Togo.

But, at the last minute, Stambouli chose to take up an offer to run Montpellier's training centre instead and Abdou was suddenly thrust onto the international stage.

His first task was to set about persuading players from the diaspora to commit to the team, steadily growing the standard of players from those in the amateur ranks to players competing in the top three tiers of French football. "It was difficult but I don't think any of them regret a thing," recalls Abdou. "This is a fervour, a love for the jersey and for the homeland."

> Abdou spent as much time coaching as he did organising travel and even the team's kit. Sometimes he had to dip into his own pocket to help with the logistics

Abdou spent as much time coaching and preparing for internationals, as he did organising travel and even the team's kit. Sometimes he had to dip into his own pocket to help with the logistics and he worked part-time until 2017, when the offer of a miserly monthly salary of just €2,000 gave him enough leeway to leave his job working in the youth services in Agen.

He still has two jobs, however, last year being hired as coach of FC Nouadhibou, the champion club of Mauritania, who are competing in this season's African Champions League.

But the main focus for the 49-year-old, over the coming months, is the Cup of Nations where the Comorians hope to continue their fairy-tale story in a tough group with Gabon, Ghana and Morocco.

"We have worked hard and everything that has happened to us is reward for that hard work. We are no longer a team that creates surprises or performs miracles. For me our recent results make perfect sense," he says.

Mark Gleeson

Coaching... Amir Abdou

Celebrations... Comoros players

Didier Drogba

Former striker's attempted venture into politics is back on track

Didier Drogba will get his chance to contest for the leadership of the Ivory Coast football federation (FIF) after all, with elections scheduled for December after his candidacy was rejected last year, leading to a crisis for the game in the west African country.

Drogba and his two rivals for the job – Sory Diabate and Idriss Diallo – agreed a "peace pact" in June after the intervention of FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who has made little secret of his wish to have the former Chelsea superstar at the helm of one of the most important FAs on the African continent.

Elections were scheduled for May last year, with Drogba a controversial candidate despite his hero status among the fans. The Elephants' record goalscorer had drawn criticism for the lack of time he spends in the country, and was accused of only wanting the FIF presidency as a stepping-stone to a more prominent position within FIFA and the Confederation of African Football.

The Ivorian federation have a complicated system to elect their leader, with prospective candidates needing the backing of several clubs plus one of five special interest groups – the players' union, the former players' association, the referees, coaches and doctors.

It was here that the impasse came last year: Drogba was embarrassingly rejected by his own peers, but supposedly obtained the backing of the referees, only for a comprehensive vote in his favour at a meeting to be rejected by the refereeing leadership, who had already promised their backing to Diabate.

This was among several alleged underhand dealings that looked designed to keep Drogba off the ballot, even while his detractors were claiming he would not win anyway.

All the shenanigans prompted the suspension of the federation by FIFA "because of its inability to organise an electoral procedure in accordance with the statutory and regulatory requirements of FIFA".

Presidential hopeful... Drogba at the AFCON 2021 draw in August

A normalisation committee set up by FIFA has run the game in the country since late last year, while Infantino has worked on trying to forge a compromise that would see Drogba elected unopposed, just like he engineered in March when Patrice Motsepe became CAF president without a vote despite several candidates initially entering the race.

> [Gianni] Infantino has worked on trying to forge a compromise that would see Drogba elected unopposed, just like he engineered in March when Patrice Motsepe became CAF president

But it does not look like a similar compromise will come to pass in the Ivory Coast and Drogba, now 43, is set to have his popularity tested at the polls. They were first promised for November but have now been set back by a month with no fixed December date as of yet.

Drogba has, in the meantime, quit his role as vice-president of the Association of Ivorian Footballers, who had surprisingly failed to back his candidacy.

Cyril Domoraud, who like Drogba also played at Olympique Marseille, endorsed Diallo instead and Drogba has since accused his former international team-mate of "hijacking" the union in a lengthy letter posted on Twitter.

Interestingly, Drogba has just signed a deal to work as a TV analyst with France's Canal Plus, presumably hedging his bets with a lucrative alternate option should his political aspirations fall flat.

Mark Gleeson

Jamaica

After a terrible start, the Reggae Boyz are finally clicking into gear to get their World Cup qualifying campaign back on track

After 261 minutes without a goal, Jamaica were never going to be too picky about how they got the ball into the back of the net – which was just as well. Their opener v Honduras in San Pedro Sula, which ended the drought, benefitted from more than a touch of farce.

Inexplicably, Honduras' Andy Najar lost Jamaica winger Junior Flemmings to a long, lofted ball by defender Damion Lowe. Najar recovered, only for central defender Marcelo Pereira to whack his clearance straight off his head. The ball broke for Jamaica's Shamar Nicholson, whose wild shot turned into an incisive cross, and team-mate Kemar Roofe stuck his boot out to claim his first international goal for the Reggae Boyz.

Not exactly a well-rehearsed move from the training ground.

Still, the goal put Jamaica ahead for the first time in this Qatar 2022 World Cup qualifying campaign, and coach Theodore Whitmore's men did not let the slice of good fortune go to waste, as they held out for a 2-0 triumph.

Jamaica are tied with El Salvador – who they play next – on five points, but with a better goal difference. November's window is crucial if they are to claw their way back into contention for one of the three qualifying spots; or, more likely, the fourth-place play-off berth.

The Boyz can be more than a handful if they get going, as proven by successive top-four CONCACAF Gold Cup finishes in 2017 and 2019. But a combination of in-fighting between players and administrators, and the COVID-19 pandemic – which temporarily shut down Jamaica's domestic leagues, forced them to play home qualifiers in front of empty stands and even affected their access to British-based players – has stalled their progress.

Jamaica entered the three-game October window without the services of highly-touted West Ham United forward Michail Antonio, after the Jamaica Football Federation was unable to arrange for the player's personal physio to travel with him from England.

Jamaica, the sprint capital of the world for much of this millennium, knows a thing or two about treating high-end athletes. So it is safe to say that Antonio's apparent reluctance to trust his hamstrings to the island's medical staff, coupled with his disastrous debut in a 3-0 home defeat to Panama in September, did not go down well.

Off the mark...Kemar Roofe celebrates scoring against Honduras, his first goal in four caps

Not that Antonio should shoulder the blame for Jamaica's too often insipid performances.

In six games so far, Whitmore has used 23 different starters, which will become 24 when Aston Villa winger Leon Bailey is finally declared fit and ready to play.

To put that into context, only USA coach Gregg Berhalter has used more (27 players). And Berhalter can point to his 2021 Gold Cup success with a second-choice team as evidence of the depth of his player pool.

> "We know our work is cut out for us going forward"
>
> **Jamaica defender Damion Lowe**

The clash between Jamaica and USA told its own story, with the Jamaicans outworked and overrun in a 2-0 defeat that flattered the visitors in Austin, Texas.

Whitmore made four changes to his XI to face a rampant Canada in Kingston on October 10, after eight, eight and six alterations in his previous three contests.

His recall of 37-year-old midfielder Je-Vaughn Watson initally smacked of desperation, but turned out an inspired choice as they matched Alphonso Davies and Co. in a goalless draw.

"The team has been working very hard to get better results and better performances," Lowe told *World Soccer*. "We know our work is cut out for us going forward and the team hasn't been getting the results we want or that our fans expect. But we continue to look ahead and have high expectations."

Lowe, who was suspended for the Canada tie, was one of just two changes against Honduras as Whitmore finally had something to build on. And, despite their good fortune for the opener, this was closer to the tenacious, athletic outfit that had earned the respect of the confederation in recent times.

There was redemption for Whitmore as well. Derided in some quarters for his "haphazard" team selection, he might have provoked eye-rolling in the 79th minute when he replaced Nicholson, Jamaica's top scorer and most gifted attacker, with right-back Javain Brown.

Whitmore then asked his regular full-back, Oniel Fisher – an LA Galaxy player who had never scored in 11 years as a junior or senior international – to play as a left-winger in a defensive move.

So naturally, Fisher cut in off the flank and scored with a far-post finish that Cristiano Ronaldo would have been proud of, with his first and only shot.

The Reggae Boyz are still in this. And they could be more formidable still if Antonio and Bailey would pitch in.

Lasana Liburd

Dynamo Kiev

Club's offshore accounting places a spotlight on their finances

The severe injury of 25-year-old Ukraine forward Artem Besedin, picked up during Euro 2020, revealed an unsightly picture of the long-term financial practices adopted by his club Dynamo Kiev.

Besedin's injury meant that Dynamo were eligible for compensation from FIFA under the Club Protection Programme (CPP) during his treatment for a period of approximately six months. The programme compensates clubs up to a maximum of €7.5 million per player, per injury. The maximum of €7.5m is calculated at a daily pro rata compensation, which is payable for a maximum of 365 days after the first 28 days of the injury. The compensation is based on the player's fixed salary, and does not include variable amounts, one-off payments or any bonuses, including performance bonuses.

Besedin's case exposed the fact that Dynamo Kiev appear to have been cheating the system.

According to Ukraine's tax authorities, Besedin is paid the equivalent of €290 per month, meaning that Dynamo's CPP compensation would amount to just €9.70 per day for each day of the player's injury, and €1,485 for five months.

Yet his full salary is actually much higher. In 2017, an offshore company, Dynamo Kiev (Cyprus) Ltd. was established, which receives all of the Ukrainian club's prize money from UEFA. The same company concludes individual image contracts with all Dynamo Kiev players, including Besedin. Under his image contract, he receives €45,000 a month – approximately 155 times greater than the sum he officially receives in Ukraine.

While the offshore salary scheme may go unpunished in Ukraine, it will give FIFA and UEFA a reason to take a closer look at the club's financial arrangements.

The club's president, Ihor Surkis, swiftly announced that he would not demand compensation from FIFA, and that the club would treat Besedin at its own expense – news that came as no surprise to observers in Ukraine.

Carried off...Besedin was injured in the Euro 2020 last 16 clash with Sweden

"Both Dynamo Kiev and Shakhtar Donetsk are oligarchic clubs, but they have a completely different approach to the football business," explains Serhiy Fursa, one of Ukraine's leading economists. "Shakhtar builds capitalisation based on transparent cash flows and trying to play by the rules. Dynamo is exactly the opposite. In their case, the players are not paid by the club, but by some offshore company. Accordingly, what taxes can there be?

> "In Dynamo Kiev's case, the players are not paid by the club, but by some offshore company. Accordingly, what taxes can there be?"
>
> **Serhiy Fursa, Ukrainian economist**

"If salaries are paid not by the club, but by an offshore company that has signed contracts with the players, then there are no taxes. In the case of Dynamo, this is a matter of building a football business. If you are building an offshore-scheme business, then you do not pay taxes."

Club president... Ihor Surkis

The Besedin case was not an accidental episode for Surkis. He inherited the offshore management scheme of the club from his older brother Hryhoriy.

On July 27, 1993, when Hryhoriy Surkis took over as president of Dynamo, the club entered into an agreement with the offshore company Newport Management Ltd. from the British Virgin Islands. On July 28, 2000, it was extended for another 20 years. Under this agreement, Dynamo Kiev transferred all commercial areas – including television and marketing rights, as well as rights to buy and sell players – to Newport Management.

How much money Newport spent in 2011-17 to buy players for Dynamo was revealed in the FIFA statistics published by Football Leaks. According to them, the club bought 82 players in seven years, spending $324m.

"The owners of Dynamo were the largest importers of oil products to Ukraine. Why? Because they had privileges from presidents of the country who loved football," explains Fursa. "They imported these oil products into the country duty-free. This is a colossal, huge amount of money. It is clear they sheltered them from the reporting. The main financial flows went through offshore companies".

For the Surkis brothers, football has long provided a means for murky financial dealings – although that hasn't stopped Hryhoriy from serving on UEFA's executive committee.

"Unfortunately, there is no rule of law in Ukraine. In Spain, there are examples of court decisions for tax crimes of [Cristiano] Ronaldo and [Lionel] Messi. This is not the case in Ukraine. That is the difference. In Ukraine, Surkis can do this because tax authorities don't even try to punish him", Fursa concludes.

For Dynamo, it seems that nothing has changed in almost three decades. Ukraine's most successful club remains a relic of the oligarchic business of the 1990s. The Surkis brothers still sit in the VIP box of the Olimpiyskiy Stadium in Kiev and watch their tax-free Dynamo play, surrounded by ex-presidents of Ukraine.

Oleg Zadernovsky

eye witness

Emmanuel Ayamga reports

GHANA

Ending the drought: How Samuel Boadu rebuilt Hearts of Oak

In February 2020, a long-suffering Hearts of Oak fan made a passionate appeal to meet the squad. When his wish was eventually granted, he used the moment to deliver a short prophecy.

Surrounded by players of his beloved Hearts, 68-year-old Ataa Abbey – confined to a wheelchair – told them they would win the Ghana Premier League. "God has ordained it," he added.

The how and when remained a mystery. Suffice to say that campaign came to an abrupt end due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The seasons before had seen the Phobians suffer heartbreak after heartbreak, culminating in a decade-long trophy drought. ▸

History-makers...Hearts of Oak line up before a game

The years of underachievement had eroded every slice of hope from the thinking of the Hearts faithful. Such despondency meant none made much of this prophecy. The club was desperately crying out for characters, people with competence and gusto to return Hearts to its old standing of greatness.

Enter Samuel Boadu.

The 35-year-old had shown great promise with Ghana Premier League side Medeama before being prised away to the capital midway through the season. Boadu joined Hearts in March 2021 when they were struggling to find their feet. The Accra-based club was languishing in mid-table after an inconsistent start to the campaign.

What followed, though, is a story that will be told for many years to come. Boadu not only succeeded in changing the fortunes of the club, but more importantly, led them to an improbable double of league and FA Cup titles – Hearts' first pieces of major silverware since 2009.

It is always a difficult task to rebuild a team but the challenge is even more arduous when a manager takes over a fragile, disorganised and unsettled side midway through the season.

That was the situation Boadu found himself in when he joined Hearts – a team filled with raw talents lacking character and spirit to reach their full potential.

Inspirational... Samuel Boadu

The Phobians had started the 2020-21 season with Edward Nii Odoom as head coach, but he was demoted to the club's Under-20s after failing to win either of their opening two matches. In his stead, Kosta Papic assumed the reins. The Serbian arrived with an impressive CV, made all the more enticing by the fact that he was the last man to lead the club to a major trophy – the league title back in 2009.

A goalless draw with Karela United in his debut game served up a reality check, but three wins in Hearts' next four matches, including a 6-1 drubbing of Bechem United, restored calm and painted a picture of better things to come.

Second comings, though, do not always follow a particular pattern as Papic soon found out. Those three victories proved to be the zenith of Papic's spell in charge, as things quickly began to unravel. Following a fall out between the Serbian and some senior players, the Phobians won just one of their next six league matches, leading to a parting of ways.

By the time Boadu took charge on March 1, Hearts had had three different managers before him, with Samuel Nii Noi also handling three matches as interim boss.

To have four different managers in a single season only typifies the sort of wreck that Hearts was. For a club with 20 league titles, ten FA Cups, and one of the few African teams to have won every major continental trophy – Champions League, Confederations Cup and Super Cup – years of mismanagement had robbed them of sustained success.

But the decision to put Boadu in charge proved shrewd. At the time he joined, 16 of 34 league matches had

already been played, with Hearts sitting outside the top four.

To the neutral, Boadu's decision to swap Medeama – a team that was second in the table – for Hearts made no sense. Here was a side on the decline, one that hadn't won a major trophy in 12 years. Indeed, a few years earlier, Hearts were nearly relegated and only survived on the final day of the season.

In stark contrast, Boadu and Medeama were on the ascendency. In his three-and-a-half years with the Mauve and Yellow, he made them serial title contenders.

Twice, Boadu was on the verge of leading Medeama to the league title, guiding them to the top of the table and pulling away from their rivals, only for those seasons to be truncated – first due to a massive corruption scandal that hit the Ghana FA in 2018, and then with the COVID-induced cancellation of the 2019-20 season.

And yet, Boadu walked away to join a team in total disarray. He relished the opportunity to manage one of Ghana's most successful clubs and restore them to their glory days. In his first training session, Boadu told Hearts' players that he was going to end the season with a trophy.

In the end, he was wrong: they finished with two trophies.

On Boadu's debut, Hearts produced a flawless performance, routing WAFA 4-0 at home. It was a dream first game, and a 2-0 win over Aduana Stars the following week only added to the fanfare that greeted Boadu's arrival.

But just like Papic's ill-fated tenure, Boadu's reality check dawned when a miserable run of one win in four matches followed. A drab 2-0 defeat away at Dreams FC at the start of May particularly raised alarm. If the result was unacceptable, the team's performance was more concerning.

Boadu's side was completely outplayed, outrun and outfought.

"I couldn't sleep that night when I lost that game," Boadu recounts. "I was not myself. But then I decided I wasn't going to lose a game in such a manner anymore. A series of red cards and wastefulness were costing us, so we needed to correct that."

And correct that he did.

Those difficult weeks afforded him the chance to get to know his players better, fashioning a successful team out of unfamiliar components and wisely adapting to their strengths. This culminated in an 11-game unbeaten run that catapulted Hearts to the top of the league table. They were stingy in defence, keeping seven clean sheets, while never scoring more than twice.

Everything was finally coming together. A team identity was also built along the way, formed around materials available to Boadu instead of imposed upon them.

"I had to adapt to the strength of my players," Boadu said later. Captain Fatawu Mohammed regained his mojo at right-back, the defensive duo of Robert Addo and Mohammed Alhassan took it in turns to pocket opposition attackers, while left-back Raddy Ovouka became unplayable.

Boadu relished the opportunity to manage one of Ghana's most successful clubs and restore them to their glory days. In his first training session, he told the players they would end the season with a trophy

Anchor-men Emmanuel Nettey and Benjamin Afutu clicked into full gear, one conducting play and another breaking the lines. Salifu Ibrahim, who joined from Eleven Wonders before the beginning of the second round, slotted in seamlessly. In the attack, Daniel Afriyie looked completely reborn and became the team's main goal threat.

In all these, one match defined Boadu and Hearts' season. When the Phobians faced bitter rivals Asante Kotoko on matchday 31, both teams were level on points with only three matches remaining.

Boadu led Hearts to an impressive victory over their rivals, where the 1-0 scoreline failed to do their dominance justice.

What was supposed to be a competitive title-decider became a walkover, as a well-drilled Hearts team completely dominated, leaving a torpid Kotoko side to chase shadows for large parts.

A fortnight later, Boadu and his side were officially crowned champions after a 1-1 draw with Liberty Professionals.

Finally, the title had returned to Accra. For over a decade, Hearts supporters harked back to the good old days, reminiscing of the treble winners of 2000 and taking a trip down memory lane to all the laurels that made their club one of the most decorated on the continent.

An entire fan-base wept and looked to Boadu to restore pride and identity to a team fast gravitating towards mediocrity. And all it took was three and a half months for him to turn things around.

A few weeks after winning the league, Hearts defeated Ashanti Gold 8-7 on penalties in the FA Cup final to secure an historic double. The league triumph was Hearts' first since 2009, the FA Cup the club's first since 2000. The Phobians bettered everyone in domestic competition in the 2020-21 season. Now the goal is to take their dominance into the CAF Champions League.

Celebrations... players celebrate their title victory

eyewitness

Lukas Vrablik reports

GERMANY

The men from the east

"*Europa Pokal, Europa Pokal!*" sang the 1. FC Union Berlin fans on a Thursday evening in Berlin, as they saw their darlings, nicknamed *Die Eisernen* (The Iron Ones), win 3-0 against Israeli side Maccabi Haifa in their second game in the Europa Conference League. The new competition has been a target of criticism by many, but for Union fans it's almost unbelievable they can see their club competing in Europe.

Union, one of the most fascinating clubs in German football, returned to continental competition after 20 years away. In 2000-01, while they were still in the fourth tier of German football, they reached the final of the German Cup against Schalke, and qualified for the UEFA Cup as a result. They beat FC Haka of Finland, then were eliminated by Bulgarian side Litex Lovech. This time, Union's European journey will certainly last longer.

For Union, based in the Kopenick locality of Berlin, it has been an amazing achievement to even get into the German top flight. They got promoted to the Bundesliga in 2019 after beating Stuttgart in the play-offs, and became the first club from East Berlin to do so. Not only did they stay up in the league, they showed they could compete with the best.

Christoph Biermann, a journalist at German magazine *11 Freunde*, followed Union during their first season among the elite. He gained full access to the club – sitting with the players in the dressing room and travelling to away fixtures – and wrote a book called *Wir Werden Ewig Leben* (We Will Live Forever). In their first season after promotion, Union totally avoided the relegation battle, finishing in 11th place.

"They played one game close to the end of season and after it, they knew they already had enough points to stay in the league," Biermann tells *World Soccer*. "They celebrated and it pretty much looked like a party. There was a lot of drinking and smoking cigars. Until then, everybody at the club was very focused and professional, but that evening, it was all thrown away. Everybody was just so happy."

In order to understand the magnitude of Union's success, it's important to explain the cultural and political background of the club. Their working-class image has attracted a lot of fans who have a special connection with the team and are important in the club's philosophy.

"They talk a lot about *Stadionerlebnis* [a stadium experience]. For them, that is one of the key words, it's so important for them. For Union, football is firstly played for people who come to the stadium. Sure, it's also for TV and sponsors, but that experience in the stadium is essential to their thinking," Biermann adds. According to him, the natural connection between the club and fans sets Union apart from other teams.

The club was founded under its current name in 1966, however it all started six decades before that, when its predecessor FC Olympia Oberschoneweide was set up. During the Cold War, when the city was divided by the Berlin Wall, Union was on the eastern side.

However, even in East German football, they were not one of the superpowers. There were at least two larger clubs than them, including city rivals Berliner FC Dynamo. They were known as the team of the Interior Ministry and the state security service Stasi, whose head, Erich Mielke, was a known fan. Union, meanwhile, were connected to the state-controlled national trade union FDGB.

"[Union] were put a bit lower in the ladder of ▸

Together...Union's players huddle before kick-off

East German football," Biermann explains. "They had to give their best players to bigger clubs and got worse players in return. In Berlin, they were seen as a bit of a minnow. However, because of the support by Interior Ministry for Dynamo, some people preferred watching Union."

Union became a club with an air of anti-establishment, non-conformist sentiment around them, as fans often used chants with a political context.

During the communist era, Union couldn't compete with either BFC Dynamo or Dynamo Dresden, the east's other dominant power. After the fall of the Wall, they found themselves in the fourth tier, but slowly climbed back up the ladder, thanks to their passionate fan-base. When the club decided to modernise its stadium, Stadion An der Alten Forsterei, in 2008, more than 2,000 supporters helped with the building works.

"There is that feeling around the club: we don't do things as others do them, we don't care what others say. I was always joking when I talked with people around the club that they are a bit of a religious sect. They were laughing about it because they knew it was true," Biermann says.

Apart from RB Leipzig, Union is the only East German side present in the Bundesliga nowadays. "Union as a club can serve as a successful East German story – cultural, political and especially economical. Eastern part of Germany is still lagging behind a little bit, and Union is an example that success is possible," Biermann adds.

From 2009, Union spent ten seasons in the second division before achieving promotion. After that play-off victory over Stuttgart, fans invaded the pitch, players cried and beer was all over the Swiss coach Urs Fischer.

Atmosphere...Union overcame KuPS of Finland in Conference League qualifying

Party...fans celebrate with the team after qualifying for Europe

"It's a success for everyone at this club. I always believed this was possible," Fischer said during the celebration.

"I have waited 40 years for this game. I'm so happy because the people here deserve it so much," stated the club president Dirk Zingler.

Fischer is one of the masterminds behind the success. He joined Union after becoming the Swiss champion twice with Basel, and led Union to the Bundesliga in his first season. Fischer earned a reputation for his good relationships with the players, who appreciate the simplicity he uses while explaining his tactical ideas. Nigerian striker Taiwo Awoniyi, a signing from Liverpool, describes Fischer as a father figure.

After promotion to the Bundesliga, Union decided to stick to the basics. Defensive solidity was the main priority, but Union were also comfortable after winning the ball and became especially dangerous from set-pieces.

"You could easily describe Union Berlin as the prototypical 'promoted

First win...Union defeated Maccabi Haifa 3-0 at the Olympiastadion

> "Union as a club can serve as a successful East German story"
>
> **Christoph Biermann, journalist**

team plays 2. Bundesliga style'," Abel Meszaros, a TV expert focusing on Bundesliga, tells *World Soccer*. "In their first season in the Bundesliga they scored an amazing 15 goals from set-pieces, not including penalties. It was typically a low-block in the 5-3-2 system, with the aim not to give opponents many chances and when in doubt, just hit it long."

Swedish striker Sebastian Andersson became particularly important for his prowess in the aerial duels. "His rise from essentially being a freely available 3. Liga player – nearly signing for a Hungarian team – to being a feared Bundesliga centre-forward is a credit to Union's scouting," Meszaros adds. In the summer of 2020, Union sold Andersson to Cologne for €6.5 million.

Great scouting has been at the basis of Union's success. The club's transfer policy is led by managing sport director Oliver Ruhnert, who previously worked for the club as a scout. Union don't spend much on transfer fees – Awoniyi for €7.5m is the club's record signing – but rather focus on finding quality players who were omitted by bigger clubs or can be purchased on free transfers. In August 2020 they signed experienced striker Max Kruse, who has also played for the national team, but was a free agent after a spell at Fenerbahce. He brought a lot of experience to the squad. Kruse proved to be one of Union's biggest bargains – his 92nd-minute goal against RB Leipzig earned the club their seventh place in the Bundesliga and route to Europe.

"Being promoted was already fantastic for this club. Staying in the Bundesliga in the first year was unbelievable, and even more unbelievable is qualifying for the Conference League," Biermann says. He spoke with the coach Fischer after the game against Leipzig. "It was maybe two hours after the final whistle. Urs Fischer took out his smartphone. He looked at the league table, as if he couldn't believe it. He was saying: 'Surreal'. That is the overall feeling, the almost surreal experience that Union has been going through."

Union Berlin started their European journey by beating KuPS of Finland 4-0 in the play-offs and were drawn into a group with Slavia Prague, Maccabi Haifa and Feyenoord. After losing 3-1 in Prague, Union beat Maccabi at home. Except it wasn't exactly their home. As Stadion An der Alten Forsterei doesn't meet the standards required by UEFA, Union will play their home European games at the Olympiastadion, home of Hertha Berlin, their local rivals who finished 14th last season.

That can hardly spoil the atmosphere at the club, which is living through the most successful period in its history. "People there are just fantastic. It's not a coincidence, it's because people at the club care about it. There is a strong connection between fans, members and the board. For example, the president Zingler used to be a fan and you feel that, but on the other side he's very rational. It all brings something special to German football," Biermann concludes. Moreover, Union already look like a side that is established in the German top flight. "Even with the added burden of the Conference League, they should be more than good enough to finish mid-table. That is another minor miracle," says Meszaros.

Record signing... Taiwo Awoniyi

digitalbits
ROMA
1927

ONE GREAT LOVE

Roma fans have fallen in love with Tammy Abraham since his summer move to the Eternal City

Words: Nick Bidwell

Ahead of Roma's game with Udinese at the end of September, the club anthem, "*Roma, Roma, Roma*" was echoing around the ground, as it does before all their games at the Stadio Olimpico. Except this time, the supporters were joined by one of their players.

Tammy Abraham had been in Italy for a little over a month, following his £36 million summer switch from Chelsea, yet already he was endearing himself to the fans. "Rome, Rome, Rome, Core of this city, One great love", say the first three lines of the song. Lifting his arms to the air and belting out the lyrics, Tammy made it clear that he already feels at home in the Eternal City.

Within 31 minutes of the game's beginning, the love affair continued, with the England striker scoring his third goal of the season to seal a 1-0 win, and extend his exceptional start to the campaign.

His first-ever senior manager, the legendary Dutch coach Guus Hiddink, will not have been taken aback by Abraham's supercharged start to life at the point of the Roma attack. During his second stint as Chelsea manager in the second-half of the 2015-16 season, Hiddink identified Abraham – then just an 18-year-old youth teamer – as a striker made of the right stuff, inducting him into the pro set-up towards the end of that season and handing the teenager his senior debut as a substitute in a 1-1 Premier League draw at Liverpool in May 2016. "I like [Abraham's] attitude very much," declared Hiddink on the Chelsea website. "He has been with the first-team squad for a couple of weeks and you can see his potential. He already plays physically like a man."

Gary Cahill, then a key member of the Blues' back-line, also received notice of the young striker's ability and determination to break into the first team.

Golden generation... (left to right): Ike Ugbo, Trevoh Chalobah, Tammy Abraham and Fikayo Tomori

"It's not often that you train against someone and within the first one or two sessions they stand out straight away and you think, 'this guy has got a bit about him'," the former England centre-back once said of his old team-mate. "I said as soon as he'd trained with us that he was a handful."

One incident in particular left its mark on Cahill.

"I'd broken my nose and I had a mask on in training, and Tammy came over to train with us. The ball came up in the air, and normally I'd just cushion the header down, and next minute I got a full arm across my face and he came across me and headed it away."

"You almost want the young lads to come in and show respect to the first team players, but he showed none whatsoever," added Cahill.

Abraham's recollection of the incident sums him up as a character: thoughtful, warm and keen to impress – but determined nonetheless.

"I was frightened at the time because he went down, and I was like, 'did I make his nose worse?'" he admitted later. "But it was a good way of saying, this is a man's game and you have to fight now.

"That's the kind of mindset that I got into – to keep trying to make a name for myself."

And that's exactly what he has been doing. Indeed, even before that blunt introduction to Chelsea's first team, he was establishing himself as one to watch in the club's academy.

UEFA Youth League... Abraham clashes with Ajax's Matthijs de Ligt

In his time at Cobham, Abraham proved nothing less than a juvenile phenomenon, leading the line with brio and athleticism. Even in his early years, when his notable height saw him positioned in defence, he was determined to make his presence felt at the other end of the pitch. "I just kept running forward to try to score goals, so eventually they moved me up front."

From his early teens, Abraham was an out-and-out striker, netting goals in wholesale quantities. By the end of his teens, he was virtually unstoppable in youth football, scoring 74 times in all competitions in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Such stunning numbers were not compiled by accident; here was a youngster heading in a hurry to the top.

And he was not the only one. Tammy was just one of several exciting talents in a Chelsea youth team that recorded back-to-back triumphs in both the UEFA Youth League and FA Youth

Cup in 2015 and 2016. No fewer than five of that group would subsequently win full senior caps for England – Abraham, fellow striker Dominic Solanke, midfielders Mason Mount and Ruben Loftus-Cheek, and central defender Fiyako Tomori – while Trevoh Chalobah and Andreas Christensen are now part of Thomas Tuchel's squad.

It was a startlingly impressive generation of talent, even if many of them had to leave Stamford Bridge to truly make their mark. Tomori, for example, also moved to Serie A in the summer to join Milan, and he has been a close friend of Abraham's ever since the pair started together in Chelsea's Under-8s team.

"I've been at Chelsea since I was seven and the one person that always comes up in every single journey has been Tammy because we've been together since we were seven," said Tomori in an episode of the Chelsea documentary series *The Pride*. "Our parents are both Nigerian, we both grew up in south-east London and we used to come in on the same days. We would take the train to the training ground, talking about what would happen when we went full-time. I think it definitely made our bond stronger and made our relationship something different."

Back then, Chelsea's academy at Cobham was the place to go for high footballing standards, where good habits and striving to better oneself were the order of the day.

> "I said as soon as he'd trained with us that he was a handful"
>
> **Gary Cahill, former Chelsea defender**

In the 2014-15 season, Abraham and Solanke were engaged in a battle to finish the campaign as the youth team's top goalscorer. With one game left of the season, Solanke had amassed 41, while Tammy had 40. Abraham, though, was determined to have the last word and duly made up the deficit, scoring against Norwich City to finish level-pegging in the marksmanship charts with his buddy.

Like all good strikers, the teenage Abraham was obsessed with his goal tally, and everything else flowed from there. "What Tammy has is a massive enthusiasm for the game," declared former Chelsea academy coach Adi Viveash in the *Daily Star*

Premier League debut...Abraham v Liverpool at Anfield

Timeline

MAY 11, 2016
Makes his senior debut for Chelsea in a 1-1 Premier League draw with Liverpool at Anfield.

JUL 6, 2016
Named in Aidy Boothroyd's squad for the Under-19 European Championship, as England go on to reach the semi-finals.

AUG 5, 2016
Joins Championship club Bristol City on a season-long loan, making his debut against Wigan Athletic the following day.

JUN 27, 2017
Scores against Germany in the semi-finals of the European Under-21 Championship in Poland, as England are eliminated on penalties.

JUL 4, 2017
Joins Premier League side Swansea City on a season-long loan, the day after signing a new five-year contract with Chelsea.

England debut...Germany defender Mats Hummels challenges Abraham at Wembley

in 2016. "He just loves playing football and he loves scoring goals. Tammy is a very strong character. He believes that he is the best. He believes he will get to the top and he is prepared to work very hard in order to get there."

Football was and remains an absolute constant in his life. Straight after school, he would run home, get changed and join an impromptu kick-around on his estate or in the park, more often than not imaging himself to be playing in the red-and-white of his favourite club, Arsenal. Quite understandably, a certain Thierry Henry was his idol.

As a schoolboy, it was relatively easy for Tammy to bully others on the field of play. Not only did he invariably benefit from a mismatch in speed, height and strength, he was more competitive too, his assertive instincts honed by hour upon hour of football in Camberwell, south London, where he grew up.

It is a corner of the English capital that has proven to be the most fertile of football breeding grounds, with innumerable top-class players emerging from those metropolitan southern boroughs. Fellow England international Jadon Sancho was a local contemporary of his, as was Leicester City winger Ademola Lookman; other Chelsea academy alumni (Loftus-Cheek and Callum Hudson-Odoi) had the same roots, while the likes of Joe Gomez (Liverpool), Emile Smith Rowe (Arsenal) and Aaron Wan-Bissaka (Manchester United) also hailed from south of the Thames – and the list goes on.

Ovie Ejaria – now playing in the Championship at Reading having come through Liverpool's academy – and Crystal Palace star Eberechi Eze were team-mates of Abraham's at his first club Bruin FC, a junior football club run by his uncle. The team dominated their area, winning tournament after tournament, and it was there that he earned a call-up to Chelsea's centre of excellence.

Loan star...Abraham celebrates his first goal for Bristol City

The sheer weight of his goals propelled him through the academy, and by the time he was 18 Abraham had outgrown youth football. His physical advantages meant that he was dominating defences with ease, yet still retaining weaknesses in his overall game.

"When he first came to me [after moving from the Under-18s to the Under-21s] he initially needed a lot of work on his back-to-goal play," Viveash told *Sky Sports* in 2017. He had to be stronger in this area."

AUG 26, 2017

Scores his first Premier League goal in a 2–0 victory over Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park.

NOV 10, 2017

Makes his senior England debut in a 0-0 draw with Germany at Wembley.

FEB 6, 2018

Ends an 825-minute goal drought by scoring twice in Swansea's 8-1 FA Cup win over Notts County.

AUG 31, 2018

Returns to the Championship for another season on loan, this time with Aston Villa.

Promotion...the Championship play-off trophy

earning the first of his 26 England Under-21 caps against Kazakhstan in October 2016. "He is so capable and enthusiastic, he lights up the dressing room and the pitch," once declared former England Under-21 boss Aidy Boothroyd. "Everybody buzzes off him. He's got a really good chance of developing into a top player. He's the most passionate player you will ever meet. You have to drag him off the training ground. He claps himself when he wins a corner."

Tellingly, not one of Abraham's goals for Bristol City were scored from outside the box. He was the classic poacher, always anticipating and quick to pull the trigger. "The thing which stood out for me was his unbelievable ability to find space in the box when there was none," revealed Bristol City manager Lee Johnson on the *BristolLive* website. "Whether it was one of his big long toes that would pop out and poke it in or whether he's using the air space to direct a header. Even in training, everybody was moving away from the goal as he was moving towards it."

Abraham would fare less well in his sophomore season as a professional, finding it hard to deliver the goods while on loan at a Swansea City side that were relegated from the Premier League in 2017-18. Just five domestic league goals in 31 appearances was

> "He's the most passionate player you will ever meet. You have to drag him off the training ground. He claps himself when he wins a corner"
>
> **Aidy Boothroyd, former England Under-21 manager**

In short, Abraham needed to step up to men's football, and in the summer of 2016, that opportunity came in the shape of a loan to Championship side Bristol City. It took literally less than 24 hours for him to announce himself at Ashton Gate, coming off the bench to make his debut the day after signing, and play his part in a 2-1 victory over Wigan Athletic.

It was a season that proved to be a win-win across the board, an assignment that quite literally turned the boy into a man. Not only did he rack up an outstanding 26 goals in all competitions, he also learned how to contend with agricultural challenges from opposition defenders and develop a leadership voice. Voted both City's Player of the Year and Young Player of the Season, he gained international honours too,

Trusted...Frank Lampard gave him his first run in the Chelsea team

MAR 30, 2019
Scores his 50th career league goal by opening the scoring in Aston Villa's 2-1 win against Blackburn Rovers.

MAY 11, 2019
Scores in the play-off semi-final against rivals West Bromwich Albion as Villa go on to win promotion at Wembley.

AUG 24, 2019
Scores his first Chelsea goals in a 3-2 away win over Norwich City, having been handed the No.9 shirt by Frank Lampard.

SEP 15, 2019
Becomes Chelsea's youngest-ever Premier League hat-trick scorer by hitting a treble against Wolves.

OCT 11, 2019
Starts his first competitive game for England against the Czech Republic, thereby distancing himself from a potential switch to Nigeria.

an underwhelming return, and he also suffered the ignominy of going 14 games without a goal between October and February. Irony of ironies, this was the campaign in which he made his full debut for England, starting in a goalless friendly versus Germany at Wembley in November 2017. He would go on to open his Three Lions goalscoring account in November 2019, in a 7-0 win over Montenegro in a Euro 2020 qualifier.

Back on the club scene, however, he bounced back in some style with another spell in the Championship – this time with Aston Villa during the 2018-19 season. Without his 25 league goals, the Villans, a big club that had seriously lost its way, probably would not have returned to the Premier League via the play-offs. The highlight of his time at Villa? The four goals he plundered in November 2018 in a 5-5 home draw with Nottingham Forest, the first Villa player to score as many in a single game this century.

Now when he returned to Stamford Bridge, he had paid his dues on the loan carousel. What's more, a transfer ban for Chelsea, and the appointment of Frank Lampard as manager, would provide him with the chance to carve out a niche for himself in the first team.

Nor did he waste the opportunity, plundering 18 goals in 47 matches in all competitions, including 15 in the Premier League; an impressive top-flight breakthrough by anyone's standards.

In the first half of last season, he continued to feature in the spearhead role, a rare instance of a Chelsea apprentice making good at the highest level.

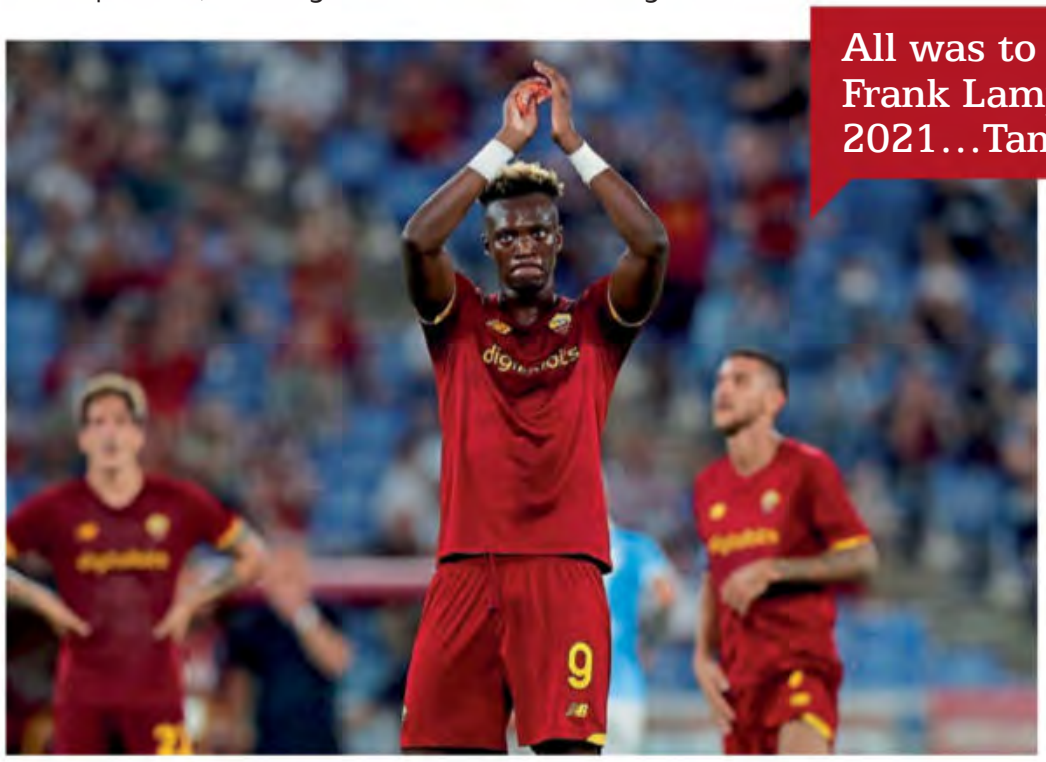
Frozen out... Abraham ahead of the Champions League final

But sadly for Abraham, all was to turn sour for him when Frank Lampard was sacked in January 2021 and replaced with the ex-Dortmund and PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. While a resurgent Chelsea went on to lift their second Champions League, Tammy was virtually frozen out, playing just 17 minutes in the final three months of the season. In the final in Porto, he didn't even make the 12-man bench, with Tuchel selecting two goalkeepers ahead of him.

> All was to turn sour for him when Frank Lampard was sacked in January 2021…Tammy was virtually frozen out

The writing was on the wall; he had no choice but to move elsewhere for first-team football. After speculation linking him with Arsenal, Tottenham and Atalanta, he agreed to become one of the cornerstones of Jose Mourinho's Roma rebuild.

So far, so good. If he and Roma continue to sing off the same song sheet, the love affair between them could grow into something serious.



Fans' favourite... Tammy salutes the Roma fans

NOV 14, 2019
Scores his first goal for England in a 7-0 win over Montenegro in Euro 2020 qualifying.

AUG 1, 2020
Makes a late appearance off the bench as Chelsea lose the FA Cup final to Arsenal at Wembley.

JAN 24, 2021
Hits a hat-trick in Chelsea's 3-1 FA Cup victory over Luton Town. The following day, Frank Lampard is sacked as the club's manager.

AUG 22, 2021
Marks his Serie A debut with two assists in Roma's 3-1 victory over Fiorentina. Scores his first Roma goal against Salernitana a week later.

OCT 9, 2021
After being recalled to the England squad for the first time in almost a year, Tammy scores his second goal for his country in a 5-0 rout of Andorra.

Tammy Abraham

TRANSFER FEE

£68m

CHELSEA'S BUY-BACK OPTION

**Active after the 2022-23 season*

CHELSEA'S TOP SCORERS

Season	Player	Goals
2016-17	Diego Costa	22
2017-18	Eden Hazard	17
2018-19	Eden Hazard	21
2019-20	Tammy Abraham	18
*2020-21	Tammy Abraham	12
*2020-21	Timo Werner	12

CHELSEA'S YOUNGEST PREMIER LEAGUE HAT-TRICK SCORERS

October 2019
CHRISTIAN PULISIC
v Burnley
21/38

September 2019
TAMMY ABRAHAM
v Wolves
21/347

February 2014
EDEN HAZARD
v Newcastle United
23/32

Years/Days

ENGLAND

8

CAPS

2

GOALS

ROMA'S RECORD SIGNINGS

£37.8m	**PATRIK SCHICK** *2018 (from Sampdoria)*
£36m	**TAMMY ABRAHAM** *2021 (from Chelsea)*
£32.54m	**GABRIEL BATISTUTA** *2000 (from Fiorentina)*
£27.9m	**ANTONIO CASSANO** *2001 (from Bari)*
£26.55m	**LEONARDO SPINAZZOLA** *2019 (from Juventus)*

ENGLAND UNDER-21 TOP SCORERS

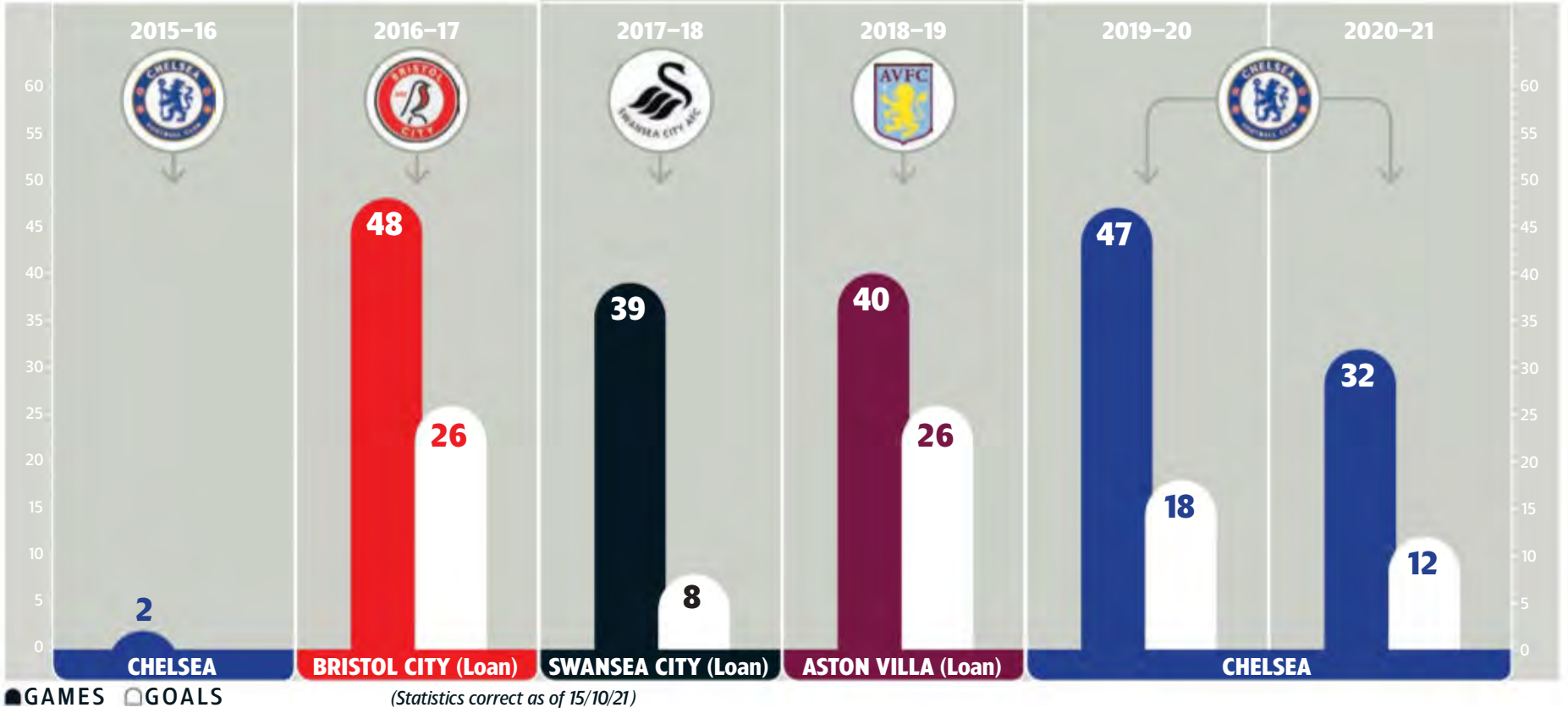
Player	Goals
Eddie Nketiah	16
Alan Shearer	13
Francis Jeffers	13
Saido Berahino	11
Nathan Redmond	10
Tammy Abraham	9

ROMA STATS

4 GOALS

2 ASSISTS

Registered in his first 10 games



(Statistics correct as of 15/10/21)

Greavsie

From goalscoring machine to battling alcoholism, Keir Radnedge reflects on the life and career of former Chelsea, Tottenham and England legend Jimmy Greaves

Jimmy Greaves was a footballing will o'the wisp. His nimble skills lifted him over despairing legs, intimidating tackles and rugged assaults of a much more physically fearsome game. Those skills alone would have been sufficient for stardom. But there was more. Jimmy Greaves was a penalty-box rapier. Statistics prove the point: for Chelsea, even briefly Milan, Tottenham Hotspur then West Ham United and England.

Greaves, who has died at 81, was an enduring personality not only for his football achievements, but also through his TV engagement with a generation born after his retirement.

He was born in 1940, in Poplar, East London, but when he was only six weeks old the family were bombed out and moved to Dagenham. His father had progressed from a guard to driver on the Underground when they moved again to Hainault in north-east London.

By then young Jimmy had made his mark as a schoolboy footballer in Dagenham. He was head boy and captain of the school team. Terry Venables, later Chelsea captain then England manager, played against a 15-year-old Greaves and once followed him home on the bus "in the hope of getting some clues about how to become that good."

Greaves was primed to become a printing compositor at *The Times* but football beckoned. Chelsea scouted him playing for Essex Schoolboys, he racked up 122 goals in one single season for the youth team and signed apprentice forms.

Rapidly he vaulted from Stamford Bridge office boy to a first-team debut on August 24, 1957. Manager Ted Drake was rewarded by seeing Greaves mark the opening game of the season with a brilliant solo goal in a 1-1 draw with Tottenham.

Spurs captain Danny Blanchflower hailed: "The greatest goal I ever saw." Charles Buchan, former England international turned journalist, reported: "The finest first-ever league game I have seen from any youngster."

Greaves ended the campaign as Chelsea's top scorer with 22 goals. In the next seasons he managed 32, then 29, and a further 41 in 1960-61. At the start of the 1958-59 season, aged 18, he had run rings around England captain Billy Wright in scoring five times against champions-to-be Wolves.

In his last match, given the captaincy, Greaves scored four times. By then he knew he was heading for Italy, where the borders had just reopened to imports. The money was simply irresistible. From £17-a-week plus £2 for a win and £1 for a draw, Milan were offering £130-a-week plus a £15,000 signing-on bonus.

Milan technical director Gipo Viani had outbid Roma to pay £80,000. But by the time Greaves arrived – drowning his nerves with two bottles of champagne ▶

Starting out... Greaves during his first professional season at Chelsea back in 1957

and missing his flight – Viani had been sidelined by a heart attack. Greaves was at the mercy of gruff coach Nereo Rocco who resented being ordered to omit another skinny young kid named Gianni Rivera.

Greaves lined up at inside or outside left alongside Brazilian (and later Italy) centre-forward Jose "Mazzola" Altafini. But Milan struggled for balance. Greaves rebelled against Rocco's barrack-room rules and said later: "He didn't like me and I didn't like him."

He had opened with a debut goal in a 3-3 draw at Lanerossi Vicenza and had totalled eight when he made his tenth and final Serie A appearance in a 5-2 defeat at Fiorentina at the end of October. One week later, with Greaves gone, Milan thrashed Juventus 5-1 and went on to win the *Scudetto*.

Tottenham had come to the rescue for £99,999. Manager Bill Nicholson did not want to burden Greaves with the label of England's first £100,000 player. Not that Greaves was bothered. He scored a hat-trick, including a dramatic scissors-kick, on his debut against Blackpool and would total 266 goals in 379 games in nine years.

Spurs had just won the "Double" but Greaves made a fine side even better. Despite his late arrival he scored 22 goals and, in his first full season at the club, was the old First Division's 37-goal top scorer. Greaves and Spurs won the first of their two FA Cups together in 1962, and they also became the first British team to win a European prize in the Cup Winners' Cup in 1963.

Greaves considered the final, a 5-1 win over Atletico Madrid in Rotterdam, in which he scored twice, as "the greatest game I ever played in." He said: "The seasons from 1962 to 1964 were the best years of my football life. I played in what I thought was the greatest-ever team. We should have won more trophies."

The 2-1 FA Cup win over Chelsea in 1967 was the high water mark for Greaves at Spurs. He began to lose his edge, was dropped in 1970 then transferred to West Ham in part-exchange for Martin Peters. Greaves admitted: "I didn't want to leave Spurs but what could I do?"

Characteristically he scored twice on his Hammers debut away to Manchester City but, by the end of the 1970-71 season, he had become disillusioned and retired, aged 31. Soon he regretted it. He played non-league football for Brentwood, Chelmsford City, Barnet and Woodford Town. But by then football had been ousted as his priority by drink.

His descent into alcoholism was not a direct product of events at the 1966 World Cup but an obvious contributor.

The first of Greaves' 57 England caps was a 4-1 defeat by Peru in Lima on a disastrous Latin American tour at the end of the 1958-59 season. Manager

Walter Winterbottom then switched from the old WM to 4-2-4 with dramatic results in 1960-61. Greaves enjoyed himself. He was a classic inside-forward, playing off a traditional centre-forward such as Bobby Smith with Spurs and Gerry Hitchens with England. His stealth secured 13 goals in eight matches, including a hat-trick in the 9-3 demolition of Scotland.

The 1962 World Cup in Chile was a disappointment. Greaves scored in a 3-1 group win over Argentina but England fell in the quarter-finals to Brazil. Winterbottom was succeeded by Alf Ramsey. He and Greaves were on different wavelengths. Ramsey reputedly complained that "all Greaves does is score goals." The comment may have been apocryphal but summed up the chasm dividing their approach to football.

Greaves was handicapped in the run-up to the 1966 World Cup by an attack of jaundice. He scored four goals in a warm-up friendly against Norway in Oslo then suffered a leg gash in the third group match against France. Later, in his hotel room, Greaves stared at the blood oozing through the 14 stitches in his leg and began to realise this was his World Cup dream seeping away.

On the night before the final all the players, except two, knew whether they were in or out. The two were Greaves and Alan Ball – who would ultimately be the "other" Man of the Match along with hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst. Greaves recalled: "I had missed out on the match of a lifetime and it hurt. I felt totally empty. I danced around the pitch with everyone else but, even in this moment of triumph and great happiness, deep down I felt sadness."

His final eight England games through into the next year brought only one goal. Yet his tally of 44 England goals in 57 games continues to place him behind only Wayne Rooney (53), Sir Bobby Charlton (49) and Gary Lineker (48) who all played many more games.

Rocket shot...in action at White Hart Lane

In 2009, Greaves and other members of the 1966 World Cup squad who had not played in the final against West Germany belatedly received winners' medals. Greaves suffered a stroke in 2012 and sold his medal in 2014 for £44,000 to help fund his healthcare.

By then he had long since gained a place in the affections of a new generation of fans for the chirpy insight that laced ITV's the *Saint & Greavsie* football show alongside Ian St John. The show, popularising his catchphrase: "It's a funny old game," ran from 1985 until 1992 when ITV lost live top-flight rights to Sky.

> "All Greaves does is score goals"
>
> Sir Alf Ramsey

By then Greaves had emerged from the alcoholic nightmare which had crept up in the mid-1960s and ultimately reduced him to selling women's knitwear on a market stall to fund his drinking. He recalled: "I was drunk from 1972 to 1977. On occasions I would drink up to 20 pints of beer in the course of a day, go home, then drink a whole bottle of vodka before going to bed."

Bravely his 1979 autobiography *This One's on Me* opens: "My name is Jimmy G. I am a professional footballer and an alcoholic." He fought it and won but a second stroke in 2015 left him confined to a wheelchair.

Greaves was so much more than his statistics but they were remarkable, even so. He scored 422 goals in 602 senior league and cup appearances, was the youngest player to reach 100 league goals and top scorer in the First Division six times. Nearly 50 years after he retired, nobody has surpassed his 357 top-flight goals. He remains Tottenham's all-time top scorer with 266 in 379 games either side of 132 in 169 matches for Chelsea and then 13 in 40 for West Ham.

In December 2020 the establishment finally awarded Greaves an MBE. Far too late: the game he loved had long acknowledged his genius.

1966 World Cup... Greaves played in all three of England's group games

World Cup winner... Greaves collecting his World Cup medal at Downing Street

COMEBACK KELE

From being banned from football as a child, to being ousted from the national team in 2019, Kelechi Iheanacho had to overcome plenty of obstacles before enjoying his best-ever season in 2020-21. Now the Nigeria and Leicester City striker is hungry for more…

Words: Oluwashina Okeleji

The end of the 2020-21 English Premier League season brought a familiar disappointment for Leicester City. For the second campaign in a row, the Foxes fell just short of a place in the Champions League having spent a significant portion of the season inside the top four.

It could have felt like Groundhog Day, except for a glorious day out at Wembley, as Leicester lifted their first-ever FA Cup, and their first piece of silverware for five years. Not only that, but for the first time in that same span, they ended the season with a name other than Jamie Vardy atop the club's scoring charts in all competitions.

Nigeria international forward Kelechi Iheanacho has already come a long way at the age of 25. While a blockbuster introduction to the public consciousness at the 2013 Under-17 World Cup promised much, the journey to stardom in his senior career has not been linear. There were periods, in fact, when it seemed he would not fulfil his potential.

When, in March, he was named Premier League Player of the Month and handed a new contract, it was the culmination of a redemption arc that had seen him battle heartbreak, depression and derision over a difficult two-year period, from both likely and unlikely quarters. That accolade came in the middle of a rich vein of form

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that saw him finish the season with 19 goals in all competitions, leading Leicester's ultimately futile push for Champions League football.

"It's obviously one of my best moments in club football," Iheanacho says of winning the March award. "It's not easy being nominated as Premier League Player of the Month and to win it was surreal. I was deeply honoured."

It was fitting that honour should follow dishonour. His big-money transfer to Leicester in 2017 was supposed to provide him with a platform to build on his breakout seasons with Manchester City. Instead, he found form and minutes difficult to come by at the King Power Stadium, stuck as he was behind the ultra-consistent Vardy in the striker pecking order.

The real low point would come in 2019. Ahead of that summer's Africa Cup of Nations, Iheanacho came under fierce criticism from Nigeria head coach Gernot Rohr, who publicly challenged him to show he was "serious by working hard every day in the training sessions" and took issue with the striker being "funny all the time". He was subsequently dropped from the national team, and left out as the Super Eagles finished third at the AFCON in Egypt.

The implication was clear: Iheanacho had taken his eye off the ball. As a result, he was widely derided, held up as a cautionary tale of wasted talent. Even worse, there was no means to tell his side of the story.

"It was a difficult moment for me," he admits. "After the criticism [from Rohr], my confidence took a major hit. I was saddened and it came very close to breaking me.

> "Whenever my father caught me playing football, he would beat me with his belt…nowadays he's my number one fan"

"What made it even harder to take was that I knew how hard I was pushing myself. Wilfred [Ndidi] knows me and he knows how I work in training for the club and with the national team – whenever I take the pitch for club or country, I leave it all out there. But, a lot of the time, those who criticise are not close enough to see what's really going on. Too few understand that, in life, there are moments of struggle and people can go down. I think it's not about going down, it's how you stand up again.

"That's why I try to find happiness in every situation. That's my outlook in life. I like to create a good atmosphere wherever I am. Don't misunderstand me: that doesn't mean one cannot be serious when there's a job to be done. But sometimes, you don't have to be too serious."

If his breezy persona is founded on anything, it is on the first-hand knowledge that opposition, however strident, does not last. From the same wells that spewed mockery, Iheanacho has drawn praise for his resurgence and the form that forced Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers to change the structure of the entire team in order to accommodate him.

"I appreciate the people that stood by me, that understood what I was going through at that time. However, I cannot judge those who didn't. Of course, people will come back and start cheering you on – even those that criticised you. It's normal. That's life. People can be like that."

Iheanacho is only too aware of this dynamic. This is, after all, the same player who initially weathered resistance from a stern father who did not see the value in actively pursuing football.

Player of the Month…Iheanacho celebrates his first goal of March 2021

Until his rise to stardom with the Under-17s, and the subsequent transfer tussle between Porto and Manchester City, there was clear disapproval. To drive home the point, the use of corporal punishment was frequent and merciless.

"Whenever he caught me playing, he would beat me with his belt. To be honest, I don't have anything against him. He was doing what he believed was best for me. Actually, looking back, I find it a little funny, because nowadays he's my number one fan."

In his late mother, however, he had unwavering support from the start. She passed away following an illness in 2013, just as her son was set to take the world by storm for the first time. In spite of this, she remains a decisive influence for Iheanacho: his signature celebration, dropping to both knees and pointing to the sky, is done in her memory.

"Whatever I'm doing, my mum is always with me. She is unique in that she loved me unconditionally, and gave everything for me. She always had my back.

"Sometimes, I wonder what the point of this all is. Having her taken away from me like that was not right; she should be here seeing what I've been able to achieve in life and in my career, and enjoying the success with me. It would have been so great to be able to buy her anything her heart desired, just to say thank you. It hurts very deeply that I no longer have the one person I would have loved to celebrate with me.

"It was just as I began to play for the junior national team that she died. With all she sacrificed for me, I knew I could not afford to let her down. I had to make her proud; this has always been my motivation. Everything I do, I do for her. I have concluded that where she is, she must be proud of her son."

As his fortunes turned at Leicester last season, so did his standing with the national team. He made a return to the international fold in late 2020, and has since struck an understanding with fellow prodigy Victor Osimhen in attack. Despite starting the current season on the bench – "We are in a lot of competitions and there will be a lot of games to play, so I'll be ready to help the team whenever I have the opportunity," he says – he remains one of the first names on the teamsheet for his country.

Super Eagles...Iheanacho will lead the line for Nigeria at AFCON 2021 in January

As a marker of his renewed relevance, his brace for Nigeria in the September international window was a telling one. The opposition – Liberia – are one of three teams grouped with the Super Eagles in the second round of CAF World Cup Qualifying. Only the group winners progress to the final play-off round, and so a strong start to the series was vital.

"It's the biggest competition in the world, everyone wants to play in it," says Iheanacho, who was part of a youthful squad at the 2018 edition in Russia. "Qualifying from our group won't be easy but winning our first two games is the right way to start.

"Despite our good start, we can't take things for granted. We have massive challenges ahead and we need to concentrate on ourselves. Some countries are already struggling after two matches and others have had their plans crumbled. A coach lost his job after two games, it tells you how unpredictable it can go and how important the World Cup is to every country in Africa."

And, as if to emphasise this point, the Super Eagles suffered a huge upset in their next qualifier in October, losing 1-0 at home to Central African Republic – their first home defeat in a World Cup qualifier since October 1981.

Unsurprisingly too, logistical concerns – unpaid bonuses and disagreements over travelling plans between the team and country's football authority (NFF) – continue to come to the fore and threaten to derail the focus of the group. Widely regarded as half shy, half assertive by the local media, Iheanacho warns: "We must prepare without any distractions because there are no smaller teams in African football. If our opponents sense any form of instability and problems affecting our team, it could be the motivation they need to come at us. Hence the need to stay focused, by giving our best on the pitch and hope other issues off it can be resolved amicably.

"After what happened at the last World Cup, where Nigerians were really left disappointed, our fans expect us to qualify and they also demand better from us. The target is first to qualify by giving everything for the nation, then try to stay in the tournament for as long as possible. But first we must do the most important thing, by qualifying for the play-offs and fight hard to reach Qatar."

Many consider the current crop to be Nigeria's finest since the mid-2000s, and expectations are high among fans and administrators alike. To this end, coach Rohr is contractually obligated to win next year's AFCON or run the risk of losing his job before the World Cup even kicks off. It is a challenge Iheanacho believes the team can rise to.

"Obviously, the AFCON is a big challenge for the players and the manager as well. We want to keep our focus on the World Cup for now then handle the AFCON when it's time. How we performed last time in Egypt was okay but not perfect because we didn't win it.

"Every team that will be in Cameroon is a potential challenger and those countries seeded for the draw are expected to contest for it too. I often hear the fans say Nigeria should be winning it, but we cannot do it by word of mouth, we only need to go out there and perform better than others to achieve success."

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

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TOP-FLIGHT ROOKIES

Words Nick Bidwell

Konrad DE LA FUENTE

Marseille

3 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DE LA FUENTE

- He made the first-team substitutes' bench at Barca on 18 occasions without a single minute of game-time.
- In his first game for Barcelona B, De la Fuente conceded a penalty in a 2-2 draw with Valencia B.
- When securing a contract extension with Barca in June 2020, he became the subject of a €50 million release clause.

In a sentence
Pulse-raising American winger with a Spanish name, Catalan grounding and wildly appreciative Marseille fan-base.

What they say
"After signing him in the off-season from Barcelona B, we were not expecting him to make an impact here straightaway. To tell the truth, we've been astonished at how well he has adapted. He makes a big difference in an attacking sense. He fits perfectly in our system."

Jorge Sampaoli, Marseille coach

"He's relentless with his running behind the back-line and it's something he's really worked on. He gives a team verticality, he stretches opponents and makes them move backwards. When you can do that, you create space between the lines."

Gregg Berhalter, US national team coach

The story so far
Born in Miami in July 2001 to Haitian parents of Dominican descent, he owes his love of soccer to his mother, Jennifer, who was particularly passionate about the Brazil national team and star names Ronaldo and Ronaldinho. He lived in Florida for the first decade of his life before emigrating with his family to Barcelona, where his father Conrad had a job as a commercial attaché at the Haitian embassy. Played for Barcelona-based junior sides Tecnofutbol and CF Damm. In 2013, Barcelona offered the then-12-year-old a place at their academy. Konrad rose confidently through the ranks, eventually making his reserve-team debut in December 2018. Featured in 29 games for Barcelona B, scoring nine goals. He played his first competitive game for Barcelona in November 2020, coming on as a substitute in the Champions League against Ferencvaros. He made three first-team appearances in all for Barca, with none as a starter and not a single piece of La Liga action, before moving to Marseille in a €3m transaction this summer. He's represented the United States in all age groups from Under-14 upwards. Featured for the Under-20 side at the 2019 World Cup in Poland, then made his full international bow in a goalless draw with Wales in an away friendly in November 2020.

> "We've been astonished at how well he has adapted…he fits perfectly in our system"
>
> Jorge Sampaoli, Marseille coach

The next step
He is under contract at Marseille until the summer of 2025, though if he continues to shine, he will be gone long before then. OM is very much a selling club these days, burdened by a debt mountain of €60m and with French football's financial watchdog, the DNCG, tenaciously on their case. In such a context, crown jewels simply have to be cashed in on. OM will aim to push his transfer ceiling as high as possible because, in any sale, 50 per cent of the transfer goes to Barcelona.

Strengths
His devastating dribbling skills. The fluidity of his play and sudden changes of rhythm. He is a player capable of devouring space, of gliding through the lines and cutting inside with menace from the left flank. Especially dangerous when bursting forward from deep and on the counter-attack. Two good feet and very heads-up creatively.

Weaknesses
Like all mavericks, he can be prone to inconsistency. Has a pronounced love of risk-taking and in his quest for the spectacular, he can overdo it. Must be a little calmer in the chance-conversion stakes.

Tomas ALARCON

Cadiz
Many observers at Cadiz's recent 0-0 draw with Barcelona were adamant that the Chile defensive midfielder, 22, was the best player on the park. And that's not the only time this season that Alarcon has delivered for *Los Piratas*. Acquired for €2m this summer from O'Higgins, the pugnacious starlet can instantly switch from destroyer to pass provider.

Matteo CANCELLIERI

Verona
On loan from hometown club Roma, this highly versatile 19-year-old attacker has all the characteristics of a natural-born game-changer: his rare acceleration, dominance in one-on-one situations, wonderful balance, eye for a killer pass and cool finishing. Recently marked his Italy U21s debut with a fine solo goal versus Luxembourg.

GAVI

Barcelona
The next deluxe academy product of *La Masia*, 17-year-old boy wonder Gavi has taken to first-team football like a duck to water. He can operate with ease in any number of positions, but is most effective as a central thinker and linker, where he can bring his decision-making, physicality and improvisational skills to bear.

Tino LIVRAMENTO

Southampton
The ex-Chelsea academy Player of the Year joined The Saints for £5m in the summer. His electrifying raids into opposition territory and never ending stream of well-calibrated crosses have already made him a fixture at right-back. A south Londoner of Italian heritage, his defensive game is still a work in progress but, given that he's still in his teens, he should settle as a marauding wing-back.

Noah MBAMBA

Club Brugge
Nine months after making his U23s debut, this precocious 16-year-old is now earning praise aplenty for a string of mature first-team displays. Coach Philippe Clement certainly trusts him, more than happy to use his poise, athleticism and diligence in central defence or as a midfield enforcer. At 16 years, four months and eight days, he is the club's youngest-ever professional.

Joe SCALLY

Borussia Monchengladbach
The New York City FC academy graduate is a mere stripling at 18 and has only been in Germany since the turn of the year, yet has the smarts and level-headed attitude of someone much older. At home in either full-back or wing-back mode, the youngster is strong, combative, quick and ever-improving in his positional play. Joined the NYCFC set-up as a 12-year-old.

Mathys TEL

Rennes
While the 16-year-old is only an impact substitute for his Breton outfit at the moment, there can be little doubt that this teenage prospect has a bright future. His natural habitat these days is as a goal-hungry winger or playmaker, but in his youth he was deployed in both central defence and central midfield, an experience that has improved his positioning, awareness and vision.

Anass ZAROURY

Charleroi
A classic example of the right-footed left-winger, the 20-year-old has burst onto the Belgian footballing scene this season, lighting up games with his ability to take on defenders at will, goal-grabbing efforts, limitless energy and infectious enthusiasm. Honed his chops at the famous Jean-Marc Guillou academy in the Belgian town of Lierse, a school where pupils initially had to master the technical basics bare-footed.

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI

"I feel like I'm 25 again"

The 2020-21 ESM European Golden Shoe winner sits down to discuss his incredible award-winning, record-breaking season

What does winning this award mean to you?
I am proud of this award since we have four fewer games in the Bundesliga than the leagues in England, Spain, Italy or France and also I played only 29 games because of injury. After missing four games because of injury, I knew that I could only achieve it if I scored at least three goals in one of the remaining games.

And you did, with three goals against Borussia Monchengladbach on matchday 32, which took you to 39 goals...
I knew then that I had a great chance to break Gerd Muller's 40-goal Bundesliga record from 1971-72 and win the Golden Shoe to go with it. But it was not so simple. I felt the importance of this record to the German public. It was a tremendous challenge but also provided mental encouragement. That is why these 41 goals were exceptional – and they are also a credit to the entire Bayern team. This Golden Shoe belongs to them.

What is more important for you: to beat Gerd Muller's record by one goal or to have become the top scorer in Europe?
His record had stood for almost 50 years, which proves what a great achievement it was. It was extremely difficult for him then and it was a huge challenge for me. You cannot think of setting such a record every year.

Muller was famous for his goalscoring instinct. Is there any skill that you have in common with him?
We are completely different [strikers]. From the photographs I have seen he was sturdy, not so tall, and had muscular legs. He was a typical penalty-area striker with quick reactions. I am tall and athletic. He never stopped believing that he would score before the end of any game and that's something I also believe for myself. The most important area for our goals is between the goal-line and the penalty spot.

Previous Golden Shoe winners include great names such as Eusebio, Gerd Muller, Marco van Basten, the Brazilian Ronaldo, and, of course, Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. How do you feel to be on that list?
A great honour, of course. It shows you can achieve a lot with my style of play and performance.

Which type of striker among those great names do you most resemble?
Some old pros have told me, though comparisons between individual players are difficult, that I remind them of Van Basten in terms of movement patterns and running style. He was a great centre-forward so if I had to compare myself with a former striker, it would be Van Basten.

Did you have a role model in your youth?
Eusebio, Gerd Muller and so on were before my time. I admired Thierry Henry for his style of play, his runs, his technical skills and accuracy in shooting. I often watched his matches. So he was an inspiration but also the people around me. I know how hard it was for my mother and father because we lived 30 or 40km from Warsaw and it was very difficult for them, after work, to travel with me to training. They tried to help me – not to be a perfect footballer but to be a happy young boy who could play football.

When you were voted Germany's Footballer of the Year for the first time in 2020 at the age of 32, you said you felt better than you did when you were 26. Does that still apply?
Right now I feel like I'm 25 again.

Back in 2020 you also said that 25 goals by you per season would be considered normal. In the past four years your average has been 31.5 goals per season. What is your standard today?
The issue is how you define expectation. For a striker, the goals tally always comes first in the public eye. However, for me, the priority must be the team. The better the team play, the more goals I can score. It is always inter-connected. For a team it is difficult to play without a striker but a striker cannot play at all without a team. Both have to work together. Firstly, the team have to win, and then I can think about my goals.

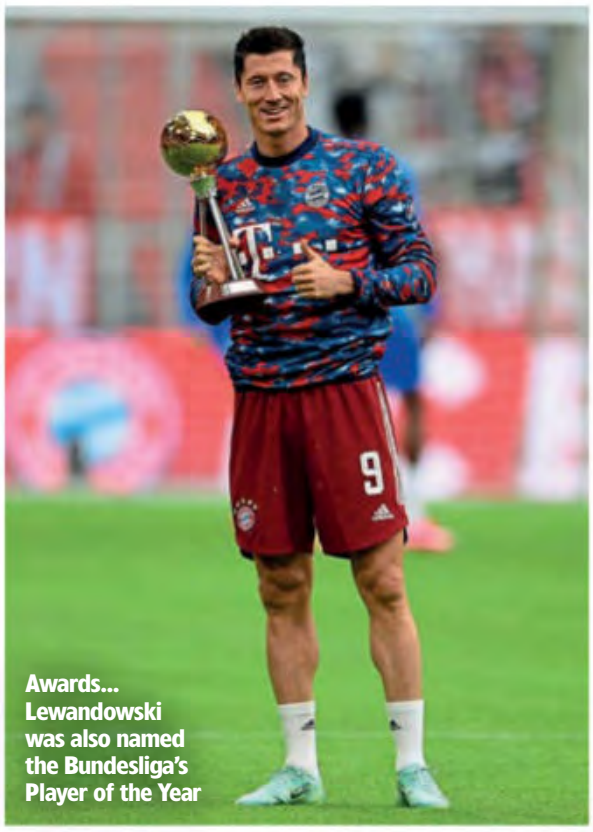
You have developed into more of a team player. How did this come about?
I looked intensively at my entire game. I wanted to maintain my goalscoring rate, but I wanted to improve the way I played. I realised that I should also participate in the build-up and not just wait for the assists. Someone else can also score the goals. The important thing is that I help us win. ➤

Golden goal machine...
Robert Lewandowski
Photo credit: Kicker

I suppose you might say that I am now a complete Lewandowski. I always wanted to be a modern, complete striker. It is no problem for me to play in different systems and styles of play. I always wanted to be strong everywhere, with the right foot, the left, and heading. At Bayern Munich there is not much space, which is completely different if your team prefers to play on the counter-attack. I wanted to be a striker who masters all tactical systems.

You once said that you always want to improve. Can you still improve?
The important thing is that I continue wanting this. It is not easy to play at the top level for many years. That is the biggest challenge for top players. Young players are not always willing to do that. To understand that, you need experience. You think differently at 30 to how you thought at 20. That is normal. I know that it only has positive effects if I work on the details. I could say that now I am good enough and can stay at this level. But I don't think like that. I am always looking for improvements in my game.

Such as?
I used to have no chance of scoring goals from long range because I was mostly in the penalty area. Outside the penalty area I might have had one or two shots in five games. So in training I concentrate on shooting from distance more often to be able to react automatically and more effectively during a match. You can hit cross-field or diagonal passes at three o'clock in the morning, even if you've woken up only five minutes earlier. But the shot at goal is the most difficult task for a striker; for that you need a certain mindset.


Awards... Lewandowski was also named the Bundesliga's Player of the Year

Do you ever have any self-doubt?
I've had days when things did not go well but I try to change that. Even if you do not feel good during the match, you still have to push yourself to perform. That is the most difficult thing for a striker. I had to learn that first. On difficult days I told myself it was not just my legs, it was my head. I worked on that mindset.

Can you explain why things are going so well for you at the moment? Or does it sometimes feel like you are dreaming?
I have always had the potential and I have known for years what I had to do to realise the potential. I know now what I have to work on in training. That is why my physical fitness is better now than it was when I was 25, 26 or 28. The basics are there so age is irrelevant. I changed my diet when I was 22 so that I would be able to have a longer career. Back then I did not know whether it would work or not but I did it anyway and it has proved worth it. I am reaping the benefits of what I started back then.

How long can you maintain this top form?
That is difficult but, when one run comes to an end, you just have to try to start another one. I don't start a game thinking about any run or other records. I just want to have fun with the ball and win. As long as I have this winning mentality, it can only be good for me.

Winner... Lewandowski collects his first-ever ESM Golden Shoe

What distinguishes the 33-year-old striker from the 25-year-old Lewandowski who was the Bundesliga's top scorer in 2013-14 with 20 goals?
I remember when I was younger how difficult it was to avoid all external influences – the media and the social media. It takes a long time to gather the necessary experience. Nowadays younger players cost a lot of money just because of their potential rather than real success. It is not the young players who are to blame; it is a problem to do with football and the way it has developed. When Cristiano Ronaldo cost millions he had already proved his value.

What qualities are essential for a typical centre-forward?
He has to have something special and it's not something you can learn, you just have it. For me, my most important quality is simply to read the game, know what is happening on the pitch or what is going to happen.

Which current striker do you particularly admire?
There are so many fantastic strikers around. In the Bundesliga, Erling Haaland has enormous potential, a huge appetite for goals and he always wants more. In England there's Harry Kane, Karim Benzema is still in top form for Real Madrid and Romelu Lukaku is so strong and powerful.

Road to Qatar...Poland are in England's World Cup qualifying group

"I wanted to improve the way I played. I realised that I should also participate in the build-up and not just wait for the assists"

Are goals like those against Barcelona in the Champions League more important for you than those that come against average teams like Bochum in the Bundesliga?
Every goal is important. Maybe more notice is taken of one goal or another outside Germany but there are a lot more goals scored in the Bundesliga than in the Champions League!

The introduction of VAR means that before you can celebrate your goals now you have to wait and see whether the goal is given. Does that upset you?
Yes. In your mind you immediately start to think whether everything was OK or not. I also know what it's like to have a goal given against you that should not have been given. However, the longer VAR is used, it will get better and better. We have to live with it and get used to it.

So what is there left for you to achieve in the game before you retire?
I don't think about what I have won or achieved in the past but about what I can still win in the future. Whatever may happen, will bring something new. A new season presents new challenges and I hope renewed success. The season still has a long way to go and there are lots of matches to be played. At Bayern Munich we aim for the highest, while the biggest achievement with Poland would be to take part in the 2022 World Cup. We have the potential and we will do our best to get there behind our group favourites England.

As for me, personally, age is only a number and, with my experience and preparation, I know I can play on at the top level for a few years longer. Maybe, like wine, I can grow even better with age.

Interview by Karlheinz Wild (Kicker) and Keir Radnedge for ESM

Champions League... Lewa competes with Barcelona's Gerard Pique

MILAN BORJAN

"Canada picked me when I was a nobody"

The 33-year-old is now established as Canada and Red Star Belgrade's No.1 – but it has been a long and difficult journey

How did you begin playing football? Did you always want to become a goalkeeper?
My father was a goalkeeper for our local club. I watched him at each game and I wanted to be like him. When I started to train in my hometown at Dinara Knin, at the age of five, I was a centre-forward but, by the age of eight, after we moved to Belgrade, I switched to goalkeeper.

During the civil war, your family had to flee from your home in Knin, Croatia, to live in Belgrade in quite difficult circumstances. Did that difficult time during your childhood toughen you up for a career in football?
It was a very difficult time, with a lot of sacrifices and losing friends from childhood and school-mates in Knin but, at the same time I learned a lot of things, I met many good people in Belgrade; so I believe all that made me a better person.

You even began working at the age of nine, didn't you?
Yes. While we lived in Belgrade as refugees, in the first period, my parents couldn't always afford to buy me new gloves and boots, and so I started to make my own money by selling strawberries and cream, mineral water and fruit juices to the vendors at the flea market.

Five years later, when you were 13, you moved with your parents and your sister to Canada.
Yes, my parents decided to emigrate to Canada and at first we stayed in Winnipeg. My parents took every job they could get, like distributing newspapers or cleaning. After one year we moved to Hamilton. It helped that my father had some good contacts there, people who helped him to find a better job. I continued with training both in Winnipeg and Hamilton, and I played for the youth team of Mount Hamilton, but my ambition was to find a club in Europe.

However, it turned out that instead of Europe you went to Argentina. How did that happen?
As a matter of fact, I first went to Italy. In early 2004 an Italian friend of my father arranged me a trial at Venezia, but nothing came of it. There were some issues with my papers, and anyway the club was in a chaotic situation and soon afterwards went bankrupt.

So I got back to Canada, finished the procedure for getting a Croatian passport, and my next destination was Boca Juniors. Again the contact was made via a friend of my father, a Uruguayan coach in the club where my dad was goalkeeper coach. I spent several months at the youth team of Boca and then I moved to Uruguay and signed with Nacional Montevideo. I spent one year there and then an agent arranged me a transfer to River Plate. I trained with the B team and I was supposed to sign with River, to become the third goalkeeper. But, Daniel Passarella, who was River's head coach, bought another goalkeeper, so my transfer fell through.

Then I joined Quilmes, where I was third goalkeeper and played for their youth team. After one season with Quilmes there was another chance to sign with River but, due to a conflict between the agent and the sports director, again nothing came out of it. Then my father called Ranko Stojic [former Partizan goalkeeper and agent] and asked him to give me a chance at Rad. So I was back to Belgrade, first several months on a trial and then I signed with Rad and soon became their first-choice goalkeeper.

Is it true that at one point, when you were 21 years old, you had enough and wanted to quit football?
Yes, it's true. That was after Quilmes and after the second unsuccessful attempt to sign with River Plate. I was frustrated about changing clubs and countries, about not getting a real chance; I wanted to return to Canada and quit football. But my father persuaded me to stay calm and to be patient. He told me that I have to continue to fight. I listened to his advice and eventually things turned out well. ➤

GAZPROM
82

Europa League... Milan defeated Red Star in the last 32 in 2020-21

After leaving Rad, you struggled to settle. It was only after you joined Red Star Belgrade in 2017 that your career became stable and successful – why didn't it happen earlier?

That's a good question. Many factors played a part but, to be honest, I have to admit that my attitude was not always on top level. When I was younger, I didn't always lead a sporty life. I liked to go out and drink alcohol. For example when I was in Turkey [with Sivasspor], I spent more time thinking of when I would fly to Belgrade to enjoy the nightlife there than I was focused on football. I paid the price for that.

I was half-a-year without a club before I signed with Ludogorets. But there the No.1 was captain and Bulgaria international Vladislav Stoyanov, so I was mostly his understudy. They were happy with me and I was offered a new contract, but I wanted a club where I would be the No.1, and so I joined Radnicki Nis. It turned out a good choice, not only because I put in strong performances, but also because in that period I met my future wife. She gave me support and positive energy and from then on I was fully concentrated on my football.

Then I returned to Ludogorets, where I was told that I would be their first-choice keeper, because they planned to sell Stoyanov, but in the end his transfer didn't happen and so I was again only back-up. I asked to go on loan somewhere, and eventually they allowed me to go to Korona Kielce.

In Poland I had an incredible six months. I was offered a contract extension, but they couldn't meet my financial demands, so I returned to Ludogorets, who openly told me that it's up to me if I would like to stay with

Canada's No.1...Borjan in action against the USA in the summer

Well travelled...Borjan played for Ludogorets against Liverpool at Anfield in 2014

them – but again as back-up keeper – or if I preferred to leave in which case they would grant me a free transfer. I got a good offer from Samsunspor, who at that time were in the Turkish second league. I agreed to sign with them, but then, out of the blue, came the offer to sign with Red Star. Although the offer from Turkey was financially much better, I was of course keen to accept Red Star's offer straight away. I was a bit worried how the Red Star fans would react, given that my wife previously had worked at Partizan, but eventually it all turned out well and I signed with Red Star.

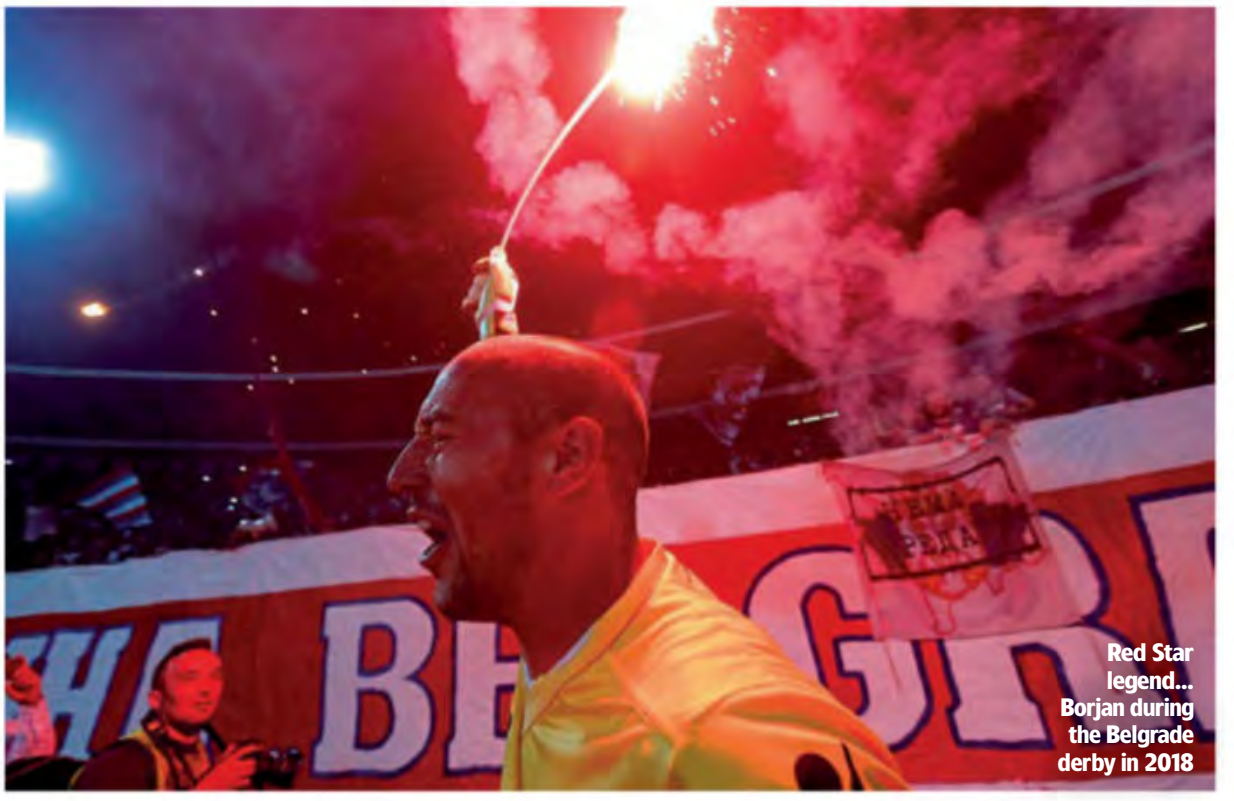
This summer Red Star failed to qualify for the Champions League, but managed to get into the Europa League group stage. Last season you were beaten by Milan in the knockout rounds – do you believe you can reach that stage again?
It still hurts that we failed against Sheriff. We know we should have done better. We believe that we are the better team, and we have to blame ourselves for that defeat [1-1 in Belgrade, 0-1 in Tiraspol]. Still, we are very happy that we qualified for the Europa League. It's the fifth season in a row that Red Star have played in the group stage of the Champions League or Europa League, and that's a fine achievement.

For more than a decade you have been Canada's No.1. Did you ever regret not playing for Serbia's national team?
As a youngster my wish was to play for Serbia. And back in 2010 I even received a call-up for the Serbia national team, but at that point I had already received an invitation from the Canadian Soccer Association and I decided to play for Canada out of gratitude because Canada enabled my family a better life. Of course, in a way it will always be sort of an unfulfilled wish that I didn't play for Serbia, but at that point it was the right decision. Canada had faith in me even while I was without a club. Sometimes I see comments from Serbia that I betrayed my home country, some people are apparently not happy that I play for Canada, but I'm not bothered by that. It's easy for those people to say such things now, when I'm the No.1 at Red Star – Canada picked me when I was a nobody.

Do you think that Canada will qualify for Qatar 2022?
For more than 20 years we didn't come close to qualifying, but now we have a really good team; a young team full of energy and desire, and some very good players, like Alphonso Davies [Bayern Munich], Jonathan David [Lille], Atiba Hutchinson [Besiktas], Cyle Larin [Besiktas] and Scott Arfield [Rangers]. I think it's one of the best Canadian teams of the last 20 years. Now we must prove it. I believe we have a good chance of qualifying for the World Cup. We are really keen on succeeding, because we know that if we don't make it now and then finally play in 2026, people will say: "Well, you're only taking part because you are co-hosts". Therefore we will give everything to make it this time.

> "I was frustrated about changing clubs and countries, about not getting a real chance; I wanted to return to Canada and quit football"

Interview by Vladimir Novak



Red Star legend... Borjan during the Belgrade derby in 2018

CLAUDE LE ROY

"Arsene Wenger wants the World Cup every two years. I think that's stupid"

The former Togo manager discusses the World Cup, AFCON 2021 and the state of African football

What do you believe is the current state of African football? Is the football improving or regressing?
I'm sure it's improving, year after year, although the results are still not concrete. But the average level of African football is improving every year. When they allow a coach to be in charge of a national team for a decent amount of time, the results are coming – like Senegal and Algeria, for example.

African football and its footballers need a bit more respect, which is why I was furious when the Chelsea goalkeeper [Edouard] Mendy did not make the shortlist of 30 players for the Ballon d'Or. Some people in Europe are still looking at Africa like an exotic country! But do they realise that two seasons ago the top club competition in the world, the Premier League, had three Africans as its best strikers – Sadio Mane, Mohamed Salah and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang?

Sure, there is still a big problem with the results at the World Cup and we need to climb and overcome this and get a team past the quarter-finals, which is the best the Africans have done to date. But I'm sure an African side will get to the semi-finals and final soon. It will happen. The level of the football in Africa is still growing every year.

That would mean a significant improvement in Qatar next year, given how poorly the five African countries did at the last World Cup in Russia...
I think that will happen. It depends on a lot of factors; good players are not enough. It also depends on the level of the coach and also the level of people in charge of football in those countries. With most of them the level is very weak. People get top jobs in football administration for political reasons. I know what a difference a great FA president can make. When I was a young coach in Cameroon, I had Issa Hayatou as my boss and within two months of him taking over, everything changed for the better. Nowadays in Africa it looks like the organisation is good, like a beautiful package, but inside there are mistakes.

Who are the favourites to win January's Africa Cup of Nations in your estimation?
Senegal and Algeria must be fancied, they were the two finalists last time in Egypt. Morocco too. The hosts Cameroon as well. My battle over the last 30 years has been around the quality of football in Africa, to encourage offensive football and I'm very happy to see that everybody thinks that is the way the game should now go. There was a period in the '90s when everyone believed the way to go in African football was with strong, physical players. If you were not tall or powerful, you could not play top-level football – no, no. Football is for all. There is a big evolution now.

What do you think about the expansion of the numbers at the Cup of Nations?

When you first started coaching at the 1986 tournament there were just eight teams, now it's 24. Small countries like the Gambia and the Comoros have qualified for the first time...
I have to respect Comoros because they knocked my team Togo out. We lost 1-0 to them in Lome in a game we deserved to win. But we lost. Comoros have kept with the same coach for seven years and they've built a team from Marseille, which is the real capital of the Comoros. They've worked well, improving steadily year after year. Gambia is no small team either, showing rapid improvement. Both of these new countries will find the Cup of Nations difficult of course, but I don't think it will be easy for their opponents either.

So you think that the expansion of the Cup of Nations finals to 24 teams is a good thing?
No. I think that 16 teams was perfect. I think it's another of the bad decisions that has nothing to do with the good of football, like what Arsene Wenger, who is my friend, wants to do with the World Cup and host it every two years. I think that's stupid. It's not to do with the football, it's completely only for financial reasons. Football is more important than money. Always.

And are you going to be coaching again? What's in the pipeline for you?
I had an agreement with a big national football team but my wife has been ill, so I have to say no for the moment. Like I say, football is more important than money and so my job is less important than the health of my wife, to be sure.

Do you think there are enough young African coaches coming through the ranks and reaching the top level?
Yes, of course: Djamel Belmadi of Algeria, Aliou Cisse from Senegal and Amir Abdou from Comoros. To be fair their education was in France, where they grew up, but they are African coaches. Lamine N'Diaye, who was my captain when I was coach of Senegal, did well at club level on the continent, especially with TP Mazembe. For this Cup of Nations you also have to mention Mali, who are a team that might surprise a lot of people. Their coach Mohamed Magassouba is a local and has done very well. I think it's a big positive for African football to see locals becoming the head coach of the national team. It should be the norm. I always tried to have a local coach as my assistant and to have him take over from me when I left.

Interview by Mark Gleeson

On loan...Ben White competes with Leeds United's Mateusz Klich while on loan at Newport County in 2018

LOANEE PLANET

Ryan Baldi explores the world of Premier League loanees

The rise of England defender Ben White from League Two loanee with Newport County to £50 million Arsenal signing in the space of just four years has been remarkable. It has also been by careful design.

White followed up his spell at Newport's Rodney Parade with an incremental step up to the third tier, spending half a season on loan with Peterborough United, before then enjoying a full, promotion-clinching campaign in the Championship with Marcelo Bielsa and Leeds United. He returned to his parent club, Brighton, for the 2020-21 season, ready for the rigours of Premier League football and just a year away from becoming one of the world's most expensive defenders.

"Leeds had identified Ben as being a really good fit for them," remembers David Weir, the former Everton and Scotland centre-half who now works as Brighton's loan manager.

"It was always a risk, because it was a relatively big jump from where Ben was to go to Leeds. We just felt like it was a great opportunity for him to experience a coach like that, to experience a club like that.

"From the minute he went [to Leeds], Ben grasped the opportunity. They loved him. It was a really good fit and it genuinely couldn't have gone any better. That turned into a fantastic loan for everyone."

The bespoke structuring of White's progression in senior football through a series of increasingly testing loans is no outlier. It is emblematic of how not only Brighton – who have had their share of success with shaping their young players through temporary stays away from the Amex Stadium – but all top sides in England now approach the loan market as a developmental tool that, if utilised with care and precision, can yield first-team stars and profitable sales.

A glance around this season's Premier League shows how prevalent the loan system is. To pick out just a handful of examples: Chelsea midfielders Conor Gallagher and Billy Gilmour are impressing at Crystal Palace and Norwich City respectively; defender Axel Tuanzebe is enjoying his third spell at Aston Villa on loan from Manchester United; Rhys Williams played 19 games for Liverpool last season, but is spending the current campaign in the Championship with Swansea City. All of them will have high hopes of making it at their parent clubs.

Gone are the days of top-flight clubs simply sending youngsters to a nearby lower-league side for a swift toughening-up and a robust introduction to the senior game. Instead, coaching staffs meet regularly to plot the pathways of their young stars, deciding who would benefit from a loan experience and mapping their ideal destinations. The playing style of the loan club, the specific developmental needs of the player, the training and home environment into which they will be deposited – all of this and more is considered.

"It will always be in the player's best interests," insists Nick Cox, Manchester United's academy manager. "As much as the team who receives the player gets great benefit, for us it's about making sure that we're trying to place a player on loan for his own needs and his own benefits, to continue his development and maximise his potential. It's about finding the right environment to achieve whatever it is we think we need to achieve from a developmental point of view.

"We might put a boy out [on loan] for technical or tactical reasons. We might be trying to find a club where the boy will have to defend a lot. So you're looking to find a league where there's going to be lots of opportunities to practise a certain technical or tactical facet of the game. We might be putting a boy out because we need him to become independent, to start to feel what it's like to have to look after himself away from home, or have to play in front of crowds, or to play where results are important."

"We loan to develop, to give our players a step in between either our academy or us buying them and our first team," says Weir of Brighton's approach. "We try to give players experiences that are going to help them develop as players. What is a massive help for us is that we've got a manager who will play younger players, so the players who are out on loan know that there is a pathway at our club. That allows us to have buy-in from the players."

Weir's role is one of increasing prevalence and importance within clubs at Premier League level and even several divisions below. A loan manager monitors loaned-out players, watches matches, liaises with coaches, ensures the players settle in their surroundings. Their job is also one of reconnaissance and relationship building.

"Les Parry, our loans manager, as much as he spends a lot of time out watching players on loan, he's actually also out observing and assessing environments," Cox explains. "So he'll be thinking about, how does this team play? How does the manager manage? What are the coaches like? What's the environment like? What's the training ground like? Do they have accommodation facilities? Is the nutrition good? He'll be building relationships, assessing the environments that players might be coming into."

"You very quickly realise which clubs think along the same lines as you," adds Weir.

While a player might be absent from their parent club for a matter of weeks, months or even an entire season, they are gone but not forgotten. Whether being readied for a likely permanent move elsewhere or on a predestined path to the first team back home, a concerted effort is made to ensure that communication and feedback between the player and both clubs is constant.

"The art is to make sure, although the player is away from us physically, that he doesn't feel like he's adrift from us," says Cox. "He's still our player. He needs to know that the support networks are still in place. Les will be watching games on a regular basis. We have an analyst who brings the clips back, and on a Monday morning the coaching staff here will be able to watch all the footage. We might be getting GPS data from sports science. A player-care team will be checking in with the player to make sure that everything off the pitch is aligned to make sure that he has success, in terms of him having access to the right nutrition, that he's living appropriately. There will be regular check-ins between coach and player, right the way through."

"We're there to support and help them," says Weir. "At certain times they might need more support – at the beginning or if they're having a difficult time. And we've got different layers of support – medical, sports science, psychological, football-based. We just want to have different communications with different people to get as much information as we can and give as much support as we can."

Not all loans, of course, are equally successful – at least on the surface, that is. It is not uncommon for a young player to be sent to a lower-league club with the intention of racking up valuable playing time, only to struggle to make an impact and find themselves rooted to the substitutes' bench.

Manchester United prodigy... James Garner at Nottingham Forest

Impressing...this is Conor Gallagher's fourth loan spell away from Chelsea

Norwich loanee... Billy Gilmour

Such experiences, though, aren't necessarily a total bust. Limited playing time offers learning opportunities of a different kind; ones clubs don't write off as time wasted.

"It's how you perceive it," insists one loan manager from a Premier League club. "We had a couple of lads who went out and hardly played. But they came back hugely informed about league football and have kicked on again. One went away and learned to cook. He went away and lived on his own. He had six months there, going to the gym, getting fit, and he came back in great shape. So there are loads of positives to take from a learning environment."

"Most people judge loans by minutes – playing time and success on the pitch," adds Weir. "But a lot of lessons are learned by not playing and are learned off the pitch, in terms of maturity, living away from home, being self-sufficient, learning to cook, learning a different language – just standing on your own two feet, which can translate into making the players stronger people and which can affect their performances on the pitch and how they think.

"Also, a big part for us is going away from our training ground. You realise that not every training ground, not every environment, is of the standard of ours. So when they come back they realise that there is a big opportunity here. That's not to say that we loan them to do that, but sometimes players realise, whilst in less celebrated surroundings, there is a benefit to being at Brighton.

"I don't think there is any such thing as a bad loan. It's just an experience that, used in the right way, can help a footballer develop and become a better player and a better person."

In concurring, Cox cites the example of James Garner. The young Manchester United midfielder was first loaned to Watford last season, before then finishing the campaign with Nottingham Forest after struggling to hold down a regular starting berth at Vicarage Road. The aggregate of the two spells, United's academy manager feels, amounted to an enriching season's experience for the 20-year-old.

"I would imagine a large percentage of the experience is about growing as a person – living away from home, walking into a new dressing room for the first time," he says. "James has been at Manchester United since he was eight. He's probably been one of the best players in the group all the way through, has played in games regularly and has always been selected. At some point you've got to show him what it looks like to not have those things go your way, because that's what the real world looks like, not getting picked, having to get in the team, playing with people you're not familiar with. I think that's as much of a gain as the technical and tactical side as well.

"James had played lots and lots of Under-23s football, so he had outgrown that particular experience. He'd had some first-team exposure, but we knew it wasn't going to be regular. The big thing for him was, can we put you into a senior environment where you're going to have to perform on a regular basis? Because Manchester United is the most pressurised football club in the world. Can you demonstrate you can replicate your skills under pressure? But then it's important that you're putting him into a club that are going to play a style of football that suits the way he plays. He needed a team that was going to play through midfield and have a possession-based game, which was why Watford was quite a nice fit for him. They were also a club that was going to be involved in a potential promotion challenge. That brings a little extra challenge – you're going to play games that mean something.

"Ultimately for James, he struggled to maintain a regular slot in the team. But I always looked at that as not necessarily a negative but just a learning experience. I think any experience on loan is a positive one as long as you learn from it. The challenge for us is to not put boys on a series of loans where the experience is so similar that the learning wanes. It was important for James that we then found another opportunity for him with the same considerations in mind but where he would get game time. Thankfully, in the second half of the season he managed to achieve that and put the two loan spells together across the course of one season. It was a great preparation for him to come back and be involved with our first-team squad for pre-season."

Not every young player loaned out by a Premier League club is destined for top-flight stardom or, as was the case with Ben White, a blockbuster £50 million transfer. But where once the loan system was a realm of slapdash, one-size-fits-all thinking, it is now a sophisticated developmental tool. There is long-view planning behind these short-term deals.

"You used to go on loan when people didn't fancy you," Cox concludes. "Now you go on loan because you're a player with high potential that has outgrown the experiences within the academy and we need to challenge you and develop you in the hope of bringing you back to the first team.

"The stigma of loans has changed."

> "I don't think there is any such thing as a bad loan. It's just an experience that, used in the right way, can help a footballer develop and become a better player and a better person"
>
> **David Weir, Brighton's loan manager**

FAR RIGHT: Third time...Axel Tuanzebe first joined Aston Villa in 2017-18

6 of the best Loanees

Nick Bidwell casts his eye over the players currently impressing on loan across Europe

1 Manuel LOCATELLI
JUVENTUS (Italy)

The 23-year-old Italy midfielder was one happy man on swapping Sassuolo for Juventus in the close season, inking a two-year loan deal that will culminate in a permanent €35 million switch. Locatelli, a member of Italy's victorious squad at Euro 2020, comes from a family of committed Juventus supporters and has fond memories of a childhood bedroom filled with posters of his *Bianconeri* heroes like Alessandro Del Piero, Pavel Nedved and Gianluigi Buffon.

Equally comfortable as a deep director of operations or thrusting wing-half, Locatelli – who began his career at Milan – is known for his intensity and supreme self-confidence. "I'm here [at Juventus] because I deserve it," he says without a hint of bashfulness.

2 Giorgi MAMARDASHVILI
VALENCIA (Spain)

When the giant Georgian goalkeeper arrived at the Mestalla this summer on a 12-month loan deal from Dinamo Tbilisi, expectations were very much low-key. For the Valencia movers and shakers, Mamardashvili was the archetypal "one for the future", only fourth in the positional pecking order and seemingly destined for an extensive stint in the reserves. Not that his development plan was to last long.

Thanks to injuries to Jasper Cillessen and Jaume, the young Georgian – who had worked impressively in pre-season – was handed the baton for the opening fixture of the new La Liga season. And what an impact he made, pulling off a string of fine stops in a 1-0 home win over Getafe. He'll now provide stiff competition for the No.1 jersey.

3 Nuno MENDES
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (France)

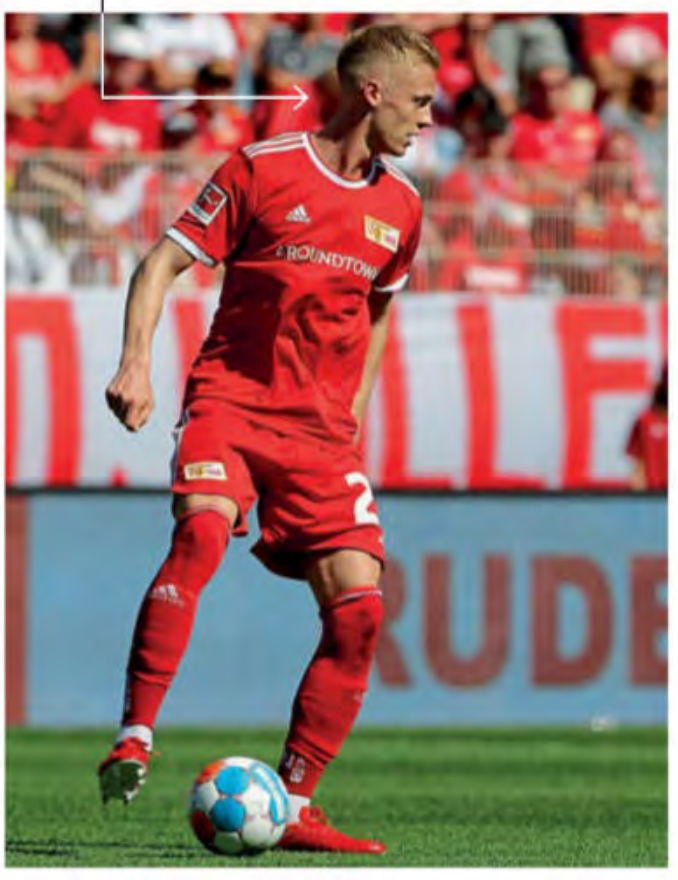
PSG believe they have finally fixed their weakness at left-back with the deadline-day arrival of the brilliant Portuguese teenager. With Spaniard Juan Bernat struggling to regain fitness following an ACL injury last year, Layvin Kurzawa's inconsistency and Abdou Diallo far better in central defence, PSG are not exactly awash with good options in that department.

At Sporting, the boy wonder showed that he has all the tools required to become world class: rapid speed, explosiveness, athleticism, aggressive intent and sparkling technique. He already has packed a lot into a short pro career, missing just five games on the road to last season's Portuguese league, and breaking into the full national team set-up.

4 Miralem PJANIC
BESIKTAS (Turkey)

After featuring in such football hot spots as Lyon, Roma, Juventus and Barcelona, the Bosnia playmaker is now off and running in a new chapter of his career – pulling the midfield strings for reigning Turkish champions Besiktas. For obvious reasons, the 31-year-old was anxious to quit Barca this summer. Last term, his one and only season at the Nou Camp, he was used surprisingly sparingly by *Blaugrana* boss Ronald Koeman and Pjanic is clearly still annoyed with the treatment meted out to him: "[Koeman] had a cross against me from the beginning," Pjanic told *Marca*. "From February to May, I hardly played. It killed my confidence because I had no communication with the coach. He disrespected me."

5 Timo BAUMGARTL
UNION BERLIN (Germany)



Union's shock emergence as an upwardly mobile Bundesliga force is underpinned by astute wheeling and dealing in the transfer market, and the capital city club appear to have made another smart move with the loan acquisition of the former Stuttgart and Germany Under-21 central defender.

To be frank, Union were taking something of a calculated gamble on the 25-year-old Baumgartl, who had flatlined for two seasons with PSV, undermined by injuries, a bout of COVID and his unsuitability to a high line. Fortunately for him, Union's three-man defence sits far deeper and, whether used centrally or on the right of the unit, he once again looks the elite part. A big fans' favourite at Union.

6 Danila PROKHIN
SOCHI (Russia)

An extremely watchful and reliable defender, the Russia Under-21 centre-back has come on leaps and bounds over the last 18 months, making a huge contribution to Sochi's sudden metamorphosis from RPL new boys into European competition participants. The loan system has worked wonders for Prokhin. On the fringes at Zenit, he was farmed out to Sochi in February where, after a short spell on the bench, he nailed down an automatic starting spot. In the summer Rostov swooped to buy him, allowing him to stay on loan at Sochi for the entirety of the current campaign.

Glenn Moore

Football's #MeToo moment

String of allegations in the NWSL prompts protests from the players

Solidarity...players of Washington Spirit and NJ/NY Gotham FC pause their game to protest

They were in the sixth minute of play at Subaru Park in Chester, Pennsylvania when play halted. Players of NJ/NY Gotham FC and Washington Spirit walked slowly to the centre-spot, joined by the substitutes from the bench, and linked arms in a circle.

For a full minute they stood, mostly with heads bowed. The near 10,000-strong crowd applauded and held up hand-made banners with slogans, mostly demanding: "Protect the players".

Then the match resumed, ultimately ending in a goalless draw, but the result was the least important aspect.

As the evening wore on every other match in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) stopped in the sixth minute for similar demonstrations. The players, wordlessly, were sending a message that was heard across the sport: #NoMoreSilence.

The protests followed a league-wide postponement of the previous weekend's matches as players processed startling allegations made on *The Athletic*'s website against the league's leading coach, Paul Riley.

The allegations, which Riley denies, have already led to his sacking, the departures of NWSL commissioner Lisa Baird and general counsel Lisa Levine, the suspension of Gavin Wilkinson, general manager at Riley's previous club, Portland Thorns, plus separate investigations by US Soccer, NWSL and Thorns. The Players Association, which is also launching an inquiry, has called for all 12 clubs, and the league itself, to be examined.

The multiple investigations mean the scandal will roll deep into 2022. It is not an exaggeration to say that while the affair should remake the league and leave it in a better place, it could also break it.

Riley, 58, originally from Liverpool, has been coaching in the US since the mid-'80s, the last 15 years in women's football. With the Western New York Flash/North Carolina Courage franchise he has won the NWSL three times since 2016, and may well have added a fourth in 2020 if COVID hadn't forced the league to be cancelled. He has previously been a contender to coach both the US side and his native England.

Now his career is over. In long and detailed testimony, Sinead Farrelly, who played under Riley for three teams in three different US leagues, and Mana Shim, who played under him at Portland, outlined what they described as a pattern of grooming leading to sexual coercion, and bullying. Riley is alleged to have presided over a boozy culture in which he would take the team out to bars, and invite them to his home and hotel room, sometimes alone.

He denies everything, except that he sometimes picked up the team's bar tab.

> Multiple investigations mean the scandal will roll deep into 2022. It is not an exaggeration to say that while the affair should remake the league and leave it in a better place, it could also break it

In 2015 the players, with the assistance of Alex Morgan, already a superstar, complained to Thorns' management. Riley was put on administrative leave, and then released. But the investigation, while passed on to the NWSL, was not made public. Five months later he began working at Flash/Courage.

This year, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, Farrelly, Shim and Morgan revisited the case, with Farrelly confiding aspects she had previously not revealed.

Sacked...Paul Riley

This led to Morgan prompting the NWSL to formulate a new anti-harassment policy. Farrelly and Shim asked the NWSL to reopen the investigation. Baird rebuffed them. So they went to *The Athletic* and all hell broke out.

A core issue is the conspiracy of silence in which players have felt they have to accept poor treatment to protect the sport.

Morgan said: "There definitely has been this shared idea that because two leagues have folded in the past, the NWSL is kind of the last hope for a women's soccer league. Because of that, I feel like there's this idea that we should be grateful for what we have and we shouldn't raise important questions – or ask questions at all."

The six-year gap between now and the original complaint prompted the on-pitch protest.

Racing Louisville goalkeeper Michelle Betos, who played in Portland with Shim and Farrelly and is part of the Players Association said the original plan was to "stand for six minutes" so people felt "the weight" of six years of being silenced about sexual abuse.

She added: "We decided not to go with a full six minutes because players didn't think emotionally they can handle it...people are hurting."

Watching the huddle, former NWSL player-turned commentator Kaylyn Kyle said: "If this isn't a 'shut up and listen to the players' moment, then I don't know what is. I'm devastated, disgusted, but I'm not shocked, and that's the problem. I played in this league, when this [abusive behaviour] was normalised. That's not OK."

Whatever the validity of the allegations against Riley it is undeniable that the NWSL has a problem with maintaining player welfare.

That the first match to suspend play was Gotham v Spirit in Chester was grimly appropriate, and not just because the venue is close to where Riley began

his career in the women's game, at Philadelphia Independence, and first met Farrelly.

Both clubs have had their own issues. Before this year's rebrand Gotham was Sky Blue, a club that had become a byword for poor facilities in housing, training and travel. Drafted players even went overseas rather than have to play for them.

Conditions improved in the last two seasons. But in July general manager Alyse LaHue, who had driven much of this progress, was axed after a league investigation into a complaint regarding its anti-harassment policy.

Spirit have also been forced into a firing, that of coach Richie Burke, who had been accused, initially by former player Kaiya McCullough, of abusive and racist behaviour. An NWSL investigation concluded in September determined the claims were strong enough for Burke to be banned from working with any NWSL players in the future. Co-owner Steve Baldwin has quit as CEO, but players and supporters have demanded he also sell his shares.

Last season there was the forced sale of the Utah Royals franchise to Kansas City by Dell Loy Hansen after he was accused of racist behaviour. This season there has been the termination of Racing Louisville coach Christy Holly for, as yet unexplained, "cause", and OL Reign's Farid Benstiti for making "inappropriate comments to players regarding their fitness and nutrition," according to the *Washington Post*.

NWSL tends to cover up scandal but now players are emboldened there may be more to come. Too much more and the brand itself could become toxic. It is all very well demanding an owner sells, but there needs to be a buyer. Few NWSL clubs are thought to be profitable.

As Abby Wambach, then the US team's star, said in 2012 of another scandal in the league: "At the end of the day, we need people to buy in. It's not always going to be easy, and it doesn't always need to be a feel-good."

But Racing Louisville's Betos, an eight-season, four-club NWSL veteran, is optimistic: "It feels like we've hit rock bottom, and I think the only way to go is up. This is the first time in a very long time I have hope for women's soccer."

Protest...fans at the fixture between Racing Louisville and North Carolina Courage

Round-up

Accusations... Lisa De Vanna of Melbourne Victory

MORE ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

The USA was not the only country dealing with claims of abuse. FIFA and Venezuelan law enforcement have opened an investigation after a former national youth coach, Panamanian Kenneth Zseremeta, was accused by a group of 24 players of years of sexual abuse and harassment, including a player as young as 14. Zseremeta, who has worked with Venezuela age-group teams from 2008 to 2017, denies the allegations.

Football Australia is implementing a "complaint management procedure" after retired striker Lisa De Vanna said she had also been the victim of sexual assault and harassment during her career.

AUSSIE REBRAND

Australia rebranded the women's W-League as A-League Women, simultaneously renaming the men's league as A-League Men, rather than simply A-League. The move follows the latter organisation taking over the women's competition, which had previously been run by Football Federation Australia. The new season kicks off in December.

EGYPT HOST MAIDEN AFRICAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

In a landmark development for women's domestic football in Africa, the continent's first Women's Champions League will take place in Egypt, from November 5-19. A regional qualification process featuring the champions of 32 nations produced seven clubs, plus hosts Wadi Degla. The latter are in Group A with AS Mande (Mali), Malabo King FC (Equatorial Guinea) and Hasaacas Ladies (Ghana). Group B features Vihiga Queens (Kenya), Mamelodi Sundowns (South Africa), AS FAR (Morocco) and Rivers Angels (Nigeria). The top two from each group will progress to the semi-finals.

BIENNIAL WORLD CUP "DETRIMENTAL"

A group of ten European leagues joined UEFA in condemning plans for biennial World Cups as "profoundly detrimental" to the women's game. The proposal, it argued, would put too much stress on players and slow growth by squeezing sponsorship and reducing the visibility of the women's game. The group included both top tiers in England but none from France and Spain.

Returning...Lyon's Ada Hegerberg

HEGERBERG RETURNS

Ada Hegerberg made her first appearance in 21 months when she played a 12-minute cameo as substitute for Lyon in their opening Champions League match. Due to a serious ACL knee injury the Norwegian striker, inaugural Women's Ballon d'Or winner in 2018, hadn't played since January 2020.

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Hobbies

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Lincoln Red Imps...surpassing all expectations

The month in numbers

The facts and stats that have caught our eye in the world of football this month...

3
Number of teams that have qualified for the 2022 World Cup after Germany and Denmark joined hosts Qatar.

€150m
Value of Italy's oldest football club, Genoa, who have been taken over by private investment firm 777 Partners.

100
Premier League games without a red card for Burnley, who extended their record in October.

13
Age of Real Salt Lake academy forward Axel Kei when he became the youngest player in professional American team sports history.

11
Consecutive World Cup qualifying wins for Australia, a new world record for a single campaign – before their 2-1 defeat to Japan.

Wondergoal... Mo Salah scores against Manchester City

151
Matches that it took for Mohamed Salah to reach 100 league goals for Liverpool, beating Roger Hunt's club record. Sadio Mane also struck his 100th goal for the Reds.

£137.1m
Value of Manchester United stocks sold by owners the Glazer family.

1
Sebastian Thill's goal versus Real Madrid made him the first player from Luxembourg to score in the Champions League.

Another record... Ronaldo's bicycle-kick against Luxembourg

8
Total career goals scored against Luxembourg by Cristiano Ronaldo – his biggest international victims – following his tenth international hat-trick. The legendary Portugal forward also won his 182nd cap – a UEFA record.

€100m
Offer tabled for Ligue 1 side Saint-Etienne by Cambodian prince Norodom Ravichak.

34
International goals scored by Enner Valencia, a new Ecuador record.

€246m
Financial losses recorded by Serie A champions Internazionale in 2020-21.

18
Years since Lion City Sailors' last league title, who are champions of Singapore for the first time since their takeover in February 2020.

203
Consecutive league games played by Athletic Bilbao forward Inaki Williams, a new La Liga record.

35
Bologna's Aaron Hickey became the first Scottish player to score in Serie A since Graeme Souness 35 years ago.

6
Chad have been readmitted to international football following a six-month ban by FIFA after the Chadian government had dissolved the national football federation.

10
Goals scored by in-form Real Madrid and France striker Karim Benzema across a nine-game spell for club and country.

57
Consecutive international appearance by forward Antoine Griezmann – a France record – who also won his 100th cap in the Nations League final.

40
Years since Nigeria's last home defeat in a World Cup qualifier, until October's shock 1-0 loss to the Central African Republic.

84
Percentage of the popular vote won by Rui Costa in becoming Benfica's new president.

80
International goals scored by Lionel Messi – the first CONMEBOL player to hit the milestone.

30
Bayern Munich's 30-game unbeaten Bundesliga home streak was ended following a 2-1 defeat to Eintracht Frankfurt at the Allianz Arena.

12
Points docked from Derby County after the Championship club entered administration.

11
Goals scored by Portugal Under-21s against Liechtenstein, with seven different scorers and a 9-0 half-time lead.

16
Goals scored by schoolboy Kevin Hubbell in a 17-0 victory over an opposing school in Michigan, a state and national record-breaking haul.

1
Australian Jarred Gillett became the first overseas referee in the Premier League by taking charge of Watford v Newcastle in September.

61,000
Proposed new capacity of Anfield, after Liverpool announced plans to expand.

Upset...Central African Republic celebrate after scoring against Nigeria

Gibraltar

STEVE MENARY

Surpassing expectations

Lincoln Red Imps of Gibraltar are punching above their weight in Europe – and sharing the spoils with the rest of their league

Lincoln Red Imps...the team line up ahead of their first Europa Conference League game

The idea of sharing out prize money is anathema to most clubs in European football but not in Gibraltar.

The tiny British territory with a population of just 32,000 was only accepted into UEFA in 2013, but this season Lincoln Red Imps have surpassed all expectations by reaching the group stage of the new Europa Conference League.

After trouncing Luxembourg champions Fola Esch 7-2 on aggregate in the first round of UEFA Champions League qualification, the Imps lost to Romanian side CFR Cluj. Dropping into qualifying for the Europa Conference League, Lincoln then beat experienced European competitors and Latvian champions Riga 4-2 on aggregate to qualify for the group stage.

The club gave away all the ticket money from the qualifiers – £7,100 in total – to a local charity, the EV Foundation, and is now handing over €260,000 of the €2.94 million in UEFA prize money from playing in Group F against FC Copenhagen from Denmark, Greek giants PAOK and Slovak side Slovan Bratislava.

"We need to make our league sustainable and we need the smaller clubs to survive and compete," says Lincoln's president Dylan Viagas, who has been at the helm for four years.

Lincoln are the territory's most dominant side, winning 14 domestic titles in a row between 2003 and 2016 and 25 overall. A traditional reliance on local players and a large academy with more than 130 youngsters attracts a greater level of popularity than many clubs who dominate domestic leagues.

> "We need to make our league sustainable and we need the smaller clubs to survive and compete"
>
> Dylan Viagas, Lincoln Red Imps president

Success in Europe has also helped the local league. Lincoln were the first Gibraltarian side to win a Champions League tie, beating Andorran champions Santa Coloma in 2015, and a year later stunned Scottish giants Celtic 1-0. Although losing 3-1 on aggregate the club has now won through four rounds of UEFA competition.

That record and other victories by St Joseph's and Europa boosted Gibraltar's UEFA coefficient and led to four clubs being admitted into European qualification this season.

"It's very difficult for teams to survive in smaller European leagues and we all need UEFA money," adds Viagas, who runs the club with investor Christian Laguea but does not draw a salary. Instead, he runs a plant hire company on the Rock, where he spends all day driving construction machinery.

Formed in 1976 and named after UK side Lincoln City, the club has an annual budget of £600,000 that is only possible with European qualification.

Viagas adds: "We don't own our ground; we don't have a sponsor and the league doesn't have a TV deal so the only money is from playing in UEFA competition and we really need to win the league.

"Getting to this stage means we can look further ahead to the next 24-28 months, where we would normally only plan eight months ahead, but organising UEFA games is massively expensive."

Viagas estimates staging a UEFA tie in Gibraltar's only suitable ground, the Victoria Stadium, costs £30,000 to £40,000. The ground only holds 2,000 and COVID-19 restrictions have cut the capacity in half.

With charter flights and hotels from travelling away for the qualifiers and group games, playing in UEFA competition will have cost around £1m this season, which makes the decision to give away a tranche of money to its rivals all the more admirable.

The Victoria Stadium... Gibraltar's national football ground

UEFA Nations League finals

SAMINDRA KUNTI

Comeback kings France win the Nations League

Didier Deschamps' world champions twice come from behind to get their hands on the second UEFA Nations League trophy

In the end, France got some redemption. In a final four of sheer drama, industry and balletic skills that reaffirmed *Les Bleus*' resilience and strength in depth, the world champions prevailed to win the second edition of the Nations League and banish the memories of failure at Euro 2020.

At the European Championship, Switzerland staged an unforgettable rear-guard action to eliminate France in the last 16, but in the Nations League the French demonstrated that they, too, have mastered the art of the comeback. *Les Bleus* came from behind against both Belgium and Spain; no mean feat after a summer of turbulence. Head coach Didier Deschamps came into the tournament under severe pressure, his relationship with the press strained and his star cast of players underperforming.

"We are still alive," said Deschamps after France's 3-2 victory against neighbours Belgium in a repeat of the 2018 World Cup semi-final. The clash between the world champions and the world No.1s delivered intensity, quality and chaos; Theo Hernandez furnishing the winner with a thunderous strike in the 90th minute. In the high-scoring thriller, Belgium rekindled their form of old in the first half, with midfield metronome Kevin De Bruyne setting up goals for both Yannick Carrasco and Romelu Lukaku.

But Roberto Martinez's side completely faded after the break. Deschamps pushed his wing-backs higher up the field and in a blistering last half-hour Karim Benzema, Kylian Mbappe and Theo Hernandez won the game. "In the second half the Belgian team disappeared," said Deschamps. "Were they less aggressive, or did we play better?"

Victorious... *Les Bleus*

The stirring comeback didn't mask France's problems. Within the space of 90 minutes, they went from both disjointed and disinterested to world class, relying on the elite quality of their attack. France remain a team of outstanding individuals, never greater than the sum of their parts. They were flying in the last 30 minutes, but in the end victory was of the quintessential economic "Deschampsian" blueprint. The accusation often levelled at the French coach is that this generation should interpret the game more expansively and expressively.

Mbappe and his star cast are superheroes who can go into supernatural mode whenever it pleases them, dealing in warp-speed football, and yet France often play a dull and stifling brand of football that extracts all sense of beauty and poetry from the game, generating long convulsions of apathy.

It was no different in the final against Spain. After a cagey and slow-burning first hour, Mikel Oyarzabal's 64th-minute goal precipitated a grandstand finish with France playing at their fizzing, coruscating best: within minutes Benzema equalised with a sumptuous strike and Mbappe got the winner in the 80th minute, albeit from a contentious onside position. Again, France, in a 3-4-1-2 formation that Deschamps may favour in the future, needed to concede first to summon their great powers of recovery. For some, that reactive nature of play is grating, but the French could have been forgiven against Spain, the ultimate ball artists of the modern era, who confirmed that their semi-final run at Euro 2020 was no fluke.

In the semi-finals, Spain's fluent, attacking display overpowered Italy to end the European champions' world-record unbeaten run of 37 games. On home soil, Roberto Mancini's team were outclassed and outmanoeuvred by Spain's brilliant use of space, possession and positional play. Through their icy grip on the ball, the visitors did what they had done in the Euro 2020 semi-final: prevent Italy from playing – albeit assisted by Leonardo Bonucci's red card – and won 2-1 courtesy of a Ferran Torres brace.

Dramatic...Theo Hernandez's winner against Belgium

> **"We are still alive"**
> France coach Didier Deschamps

Italy went on to claim bronze, but it mattered little. At some point, Mancini said, the unbeaten stretch would end. They remain European champions and have all the credentials to compete at next year's World Cup, even if the Italian coach will worry over a lack of out-and-out strikers and his ageing defence.

In contrast, Spain once again revealed how much talent is coming through their ranks. With Alvaro Morata, Pedri, Jordi Alba and others injured, Luis Enrique fielded youngsters; Barcelona's Gavi becoming Spain's youngest-ever international. Prior to the Nations League, he had never completed a full senior game, featuring in just 276 minutes in La Liga.

But he was not flustered by the Italians, or by Paul Pogba, his direct opponent in the final. He demonstrated wonderful positional play, composure, skill and maturity as well as grit. Enrique called him "the future of the team", but Gavi, one year before the World Cup, is very much the present. Along with Yeremy, Pedri and Ferran Torres, he can develop and blossom, and perhaps lead Spain to new heights.

All of the finalists have reason for optimism, except Belgium. The Belgians choked again against more storied opponents after their disappointing quarter-final exit at Euro 2020. "With all due respect, we are only Belgium," said De Bruyne. "We have got a new generation and we have missed a lot of players like Romelu Lukaku and Eden Hazard. We have to be a bit realistic about the team we have. Italy and France have 22 top players, we don't. We have to be honest about that."

The golden generation, who dazzled with attacking football and victories for the ages against both Japan and Brazil at the 2018 World Cup, has not delivered a trophy, leaving the future of Martinez – linked to Barcelona – in doubt. He is no longer Belgium's messiah. After five years at the helm, his record is almost impeccable: 50 victories, nine draws and seven defeats, but those victories have mostly come against second-rate nations and the defeats when it mattered most. At the crucial moments, Martinez reacts too late or not at all. Against France, he let Youri Tielemans drown in midfield. Youngster Charles de Ketelaere did at least provide a glimpse of hope, with his first goal for the national team.

But come the World Cup, this fading Belgian generation will not strike fear into the hearts of the other favourites, as they might have done in recent tournaments. On the other hand, the great prowess and quality of France, Spain and Italy, will have been noted, with all three in fine shape to sustain Europe's World Cup dominance.

That, in part, is the merit of the Nations League, a competition UEFA introduced to galvanize international football and discard friendlies. A wild week in northern Italy has proven UEFA right, but FIFA's plans to overhaul the international match calendar with a biennial World Cup means that the tournament may face an uncertain future.

Eliminated...Euro 2020 champions Italy

Controversial... Mbappe scores against Spain

South America

TIM VICKERY

All-Brazilian finals

Palmeiras will face Flamengo in the Copa Libertadores final, while Athletico Paranaense meet RB Bragantino in the Copa Sudamericana

That River Plate v Boca Juniors final of the Copa Libertadores was just three years ago, but already 2018 seems like the long, distant past. South America's premier club competition is about to crown its third consecutive Brazilian champion after its second consecutive all-Brazilian final. Palmeiras and Flamengo, the reigning champions and the 2019 winners, meet in Uruguay on November 27. And to make matters worse for the rest of the continent, a week earlier the same venue will host the final of the Copa Sudamericana, the Europa League equivalent. And it, too, is an all-Brazilian affair, with Red Bull Bragantino meeting Athletico Paranaense.

It is becoming hard to see how the rest of the continent can compete with the Brazilians, and it is remarkable to think that the 2014-18 period contained just one Brazilian triumph in the Libertadores. By this time the country's big clubs already enjoyed a massive financial advantage over their continental rivals. But, hidebound by an excess of defensive caution, they used it badly.

A number of important developments have taken place since then. The rise of Major League Soccer has tended to weaken the other South American leagues while leaving Brazil relatively untouched. Brazil is scouting the rest

Finalists...Palmeiras celebrate their win over Atletico Mineiro

Four-goal hero... Bruno Henrique of Flamengo

Decisive...Atletico Mineiro's Hulk misses from the penalty spot

of the continent much better, both for players and for coaches – and is able to bring back two types of player from Europe: veterans looking for a late career adventure, and those in their mid-20s who have not been able to consolidate themselves but have much to offer. And a more open-minded approach has also led to a greater focus on attack.

Palmeiras and Flamengo have also split between them the last three domestic league titles. This year they have been joined in the super-club category by the high-spending Atletico Mineiro. In this year's Libertadores the three of them have played 36 games – and suffered just one defeat, when Palmeiras fielded a weakened side in a group game.

Atletico bow out at the semi-final stage because Palmeiras and their shrewd Portuguese coach Abel Ferreira played away goals skilfully. They were happy to draw 0-0 at home in Sao Paulo – though things would have been different had Hulk of Atletico not missed a first-half penalty – in the knowledge that they could bide their time in Belo Horizonte. There was no panic when Chilean striker Eduardo Vargas headed Atletico into the lead. Palmeiras made attacking changes. On came teenage winger Gabriel Veron, who with his first touch set up Dudu to slide home a goal that was both an equaliser and a tie-decider.

The final pits Flamengo – free-flowing attack and defensive vulnerability – against a Palmeiras who excel at deep defence and counter-attack

Flamengo, meanwhile, were up against Barcelona of Ecuador, the first team from outside Brazil and Argentina to reach two semi-finals since the current year-long format was introduced in 2017. Barcelona gave it their best shot. Both in Rio and at home in Guayaquil they forced Flamengo keeper Diego Alves into a string of fine saves. But there were times when they were overwhelmed by the speed and talent of the Flamengo front four, and with Bruno Henrique scoring all four goals, the Brazilians won both legs 2-0.

And so the final pits Flamengo – free-flowing attack and defensive vulnerability – against a Palmeiras who excel at deep defence and counter-attack. The recent head-to-head record is steeply inclined in Flamengo's favour – nine wins and two draws in the last 11 meetings. But this is a clash of giants and a meeting of equals.

It is also a game that casts doubt on the wisdom of a one-off final in a neutral ground, taking place now for the third year. Hotel space in Montevideo is limited and already precarious air connections have been hit by the pandemic. In consequence, prices have rocketed. Flamengo, for example, are offering quick package deals to their fans which – without a match ticket – come to almost £2,000, a quantity well beyond the average fan.

Some of the traditional Brazilian teams have grown into super-clubs, while others have fallen into decline. A third tendency is the rise of less traditional but well-run clubs such as the duo who meet on November 20 to contest the final of the Sudamericana. Bragantino, from the state of Sao Paulo, are run on a business model as part of the international Red Bull project, while Athletico Parananese, from the southern city of Curitiba, have emerged over the past two decades as an interesting force. These are clubs with ambitions, who will look at the Sudamericana as a stepping-stone to even bigger things.

Bragantino disposed of Libertad of Paraguay 5-1 on aggregate while Athletico overcame Penarol of Uruguay 4-1. Both could have been closer but for the excellence of the Brazilian goalkeepers – another area where the country has been making impressive progress.

Copa Sudamericana... Athletico Paranaense's David Terans scores a bicycle-kick in the semi-final v Penarol

Africa

MARK GLEESON

Upset avoided... Entente Setif

CAF club competitions qualifying round-up

First-round preliminaries for the Champions League and Confederation Cup took place in September

Former African Champions League holders Entente Setif had to rely on penalties to avoid an embarrassingly early exit in the new season's competition that would have been one of the biggest shocks of recent times.

Setif were winners of the continent's top club prize in 2014, and qualified this time after finishing second in a competitive Algerian league, and would have been disappointed not to be one of the ten clubs who received a bye into the second qualifying round based on recent achievement in the Champions League.

Nevertheless, they were not expecting much resistance from Fortune FC of the Gambia in the first round – a club only established in 2012 and making their maiden appearance in the Champions League, just three years after still competing in the second tier of the Gambian league.

It was a dangerous underestimation,

as Fortune won 3-0 at home in a sensational result that stood out among all the first-round ties.

Setif had to scramble back in the return and scraped through, on the back of an early own goal and a second-half red card for the visitors. It took Setif until the 66th minute to level the aggregate score through former international Abdelmoumene Djabou, but they were unable to complete the job and needed post-match penalties to finally secure their progress. They won 5-4 when Sheriffo Darboe missed Fortune's fifth kick.

It is exceedingly rare for upsets in the early rounds of the African club competition but there have been a handful in recent times, like Raja Casablanca going out to Teungueth of Senegal at the first hurdle last year. This time the Moroccan giants were handed a bye and meet LPRC Oilers from Liberia in the second round.

There were two other past champions in first-round qualifying action, with Ivorian stalwarts ASEC Abidjan winning both home and away against Teungueth, and Ghana's Hearts of Oak playing only one match against Kamsar of Guinea, who had been stripped of their home tie because of the coup d'etat in the west African country.

CAF decided that, after the military uprising, the security situation was too risky for clubs to travel to Guinea

The Confederation of African Football decided that, after the military uprising, the security situation was too risky for clubs to travel there and both of Guinea's representatives were forced to forfeit their home legs.

Horoya received a bye into the Champions League second round and await a reversal of the CAF decision as they prepare to play Stade Malien, but it cost Kamsar as they lost 2-0 in Accra, and both Ashanti Golden Boys and Wakriya went out in the Confederation Cup – Africa's secondary club competition – to Nigeria's Bayelsa United and Senegal outfit Diambars respectively.

Ironically this was only the second season that Guinea were allowed to have two representatives in each competition as a result of their climb up the CAF ranking of club performances over the past five years, but the early eliminations could now harm their coefficient and future opportunity.

CAF's crackdown on suitable venues has had a marked effect on World Cup qualification but, at club level, stadia not suitable for national team football are still allowed for the two continental club competitions.

But the Sudanese club Hay Al Wadi, whose base in El Obeid was ruled unusable, were not allowed to host their home leg against Al Ahli Tripoli and that tie was also reduced to a single match, which the Libyans won 4-0 – although they had to play it in Benghazi because the stadiums in their capital has been damaged by the long civil strife in the north African country.

Poor infrastructure continues to be a massive burden to the progress of the game in Africa but the new, much-needed and long-awaited aggressive clampdown by CAF has prompted countries to begin much needed renovations – and already venues in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Niger have been repaired and brought back up to standard.

Clubs now look ahead to the second round after which the field of 16 for the group competition of the Champions League will be finalised, although there is then a lengthy hiatus before the group phase begins in February because of the hosting of the Africa Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon in January.

The Confederation Cup has an extra play-off knockout round where the second round losers from the Champions League drop into. That will be completed by the end of December.

With only 51 clubs entered in the Confederation Cup, it meant 13 clubs were given byes to the second round, which for both competitions is to be concluded by the end of October.

First-round bye...three-time CAF Champions League winners Raja Casablanca

One-legged tie... Hearts of Oak overcame Guinean side Kamsar 2-0

Philippines

JOHN DUERDEN

Future looking bright for Philippines football

The national team has made significant strides in recent times, while their club teams have now competed in the AFC Champions League

It has been an encouraging year for football in the Philippines. The women's team qualified for the 2022 Asian Cup in late September, the men, who did reasonably well in World Cup qualification, are also looking good for their continental tournament, and clubs have been performing in the AFC Champions League for the first time.

But there is still a long way to go in a country that is the only one in Southeast Asia, a region of 650 million that lies between India in the west and China on the opposite side, where football is not the number one sport. The former American colony has long loved basketball and boxing rather than the beautiful game.

The lack of interest was not helped by historic results. For decades the Philippines were the whipping boys

European diaspora... midfielder Oliver Bias (left) in action v China

Record goalscorer...Phil Younghusband celebrates after scoring for the Philippines in 2018

Champions...United City FC have won the last four Philippines Football League titles

of Southeast Asia but reaching the last four of the AFF Suzuki Cup, the regional biennial tournament, in 2010 changed all that. Some of the success was built on persuading members of the country's considerable diaspora, who have been brought up in Europe with one parent from the Philippines, to represent the national team. The likes of Neil Etheridge, now goalkeeper with Birmingham City, Stephan Schrock, an ex-Eintracht Frankfurt midfielder, and former Chelsea youth players James and Phil Younghusband, made instant impacts.

As the national team continues to improve, with British coach Scott Cooper doing well and on a long-term contract, and moves closer to the World Cup, the hope is that even better players who are eligible will be interested. Oliver Bias, a graduate of RB Leipzig's academy and former German youth international, made his debut earlier this year, as did Michael Kempter, a Swiss-born full-back who plies his trade for St. Gallen.

Qualification for the 2022 World Cup was encouraging in somewhat difficult circumstances. The Azkals, as they are nicknamed, finished third in Group A behind Syria and China and well above the Maldives and Guam with 11 points from eight games. It reinforced that the Philippines have become a mid-ranking Asian team, literally so as, at 125 in the world (up from 195 in 2006), they are placed 23rd out of 46 AFC members.

There was a goalless draw with China and a narrow 1-0 loss to Syria, both teams with genuine, if outside, hopes of getting to the World Cup. To be competitive against strong Asian sides is another encouraging sign. The Azkals are on course to qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup for what would be a second successive appearance on the continental stage.

There is still work to do, however. The most pressing issue is that of the Philippines Football League. This latest edition of the domestic competition was founded in 2017 and aimed at being a genuine nationwide league, rather than one focused on Metro Manila (which made sense as the game has traditionally been more popular in the provinces). Just six clubs managed to take part in the 2020 season with financial issues taking their toll.

For decades the Philippines were the whipping boys of Southeast Asia, but reaching the last four of the regional biennial tournament, the AFF Suzuki Cup in 2010, changed all that

That was partly due to COVID-19, and the global pandemic has made it difficult to get the 2021 season off the ground with cases staying steady in the country. At the time of writing, it looks as if the league will go ahead. As well as the six from last season, there is the newcomer Dynamic Herb Cebu with two other clubs waiting for the green light.

The quantity of clubs may still be an issue but the quality is getting better. For the first time, this year the country had representation in the group stage of the AFC Champions League, the continent's flagship tournament. Kaya-Iloilo lost all six of their games, although they were grouped with defending champions Ulsan Hyundai of South Korea and Thailand's BG Pathum United, perhaps the best team in Southeast Asia this year. United City, however, finished third in their group. Led by Jason Withe, son of Peter, the club defeated Beijing Guoan, thanks partly to the fact that the Chinese team had sent a second-string squad to the tournament due to travel restrictions. Regardless, for both teams to be relatively competitive on their debuts was encouraging.

If the national team can keep improving then that should attract better players, which will help the team, should it qualify for the 2023 Asian Cup. The 2026 World Cup is surely too soon, even with the expansion, but having eight spots available to Asia offers nations like the Philippines a genuine incentive to keep improving and 2030 is a target. Getting there, or close to it, should only serve to give the domestic league a boost in terms of profile, participation and sponsorship. Basketball and boxing may be still out in front in this sprawling archipelago, but the Philippines' embrace of football is becoming tighter by the year.

NOVEMBER 1-25, 2021

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

(All kick-off times, if stated, are BST)

Monday November 1

ENGLAND: In the Premier League, Wolves host Everton on *Monday Night Football*.

Tuesday November 2

EUROPE: It's matchday four in the Champions League, with Chelsea, Manchester United, Bayern Munich, Barca and Juventus all in action.

Wednesday November 3

EUROPE: Liverpool face Atletico Madrid at Anfield, while Sheriff Tiraspol look to continue their remarkable Champions League run by hosting Internazionale.

Thursday November 4

EUROPE: The Europa League and Conference League continue. West Ham United travel to Brondby, Tottenham Hotspur face Vitesse and Marseille take on Lazio.
SOUTH AMERICA: The 13th edition of the Copa Libertadores Femenina gets underway.
ASIA: The final of the AFC Cup takes place. One of Al Muharraq

Adversaries... Argentina and Uruguay meet again in November

(Bahrain) or Al Kuwait (Kuwait) will play either Nasaf (Uzbekistan) or Lee Man (Hong Kong).

Friday November 5

FRANCE: Early Ligue 1 challengers Lens take on strugglers Troyes.

Saturday November 6

ENGLAND: In the first Manchester derby of the season, champions City travel to Old Trafford.
GERMANY: RB Leipzig host Borussia Dortmund in a key clash at the top of the Bundesliga.

Sunday November 7

ITALY: In Serie A, the San Siro hosts the *Derby della Madonnina* – aka the Milan derby.
SPAIN: Real Madrid face local upstarts Rayo Vallecano, La Liga's 2021-22 surprise package.
USA: The regular Major League Soccer season concludes.

Tuesday November 9

EUROPE: Emma Hayes' Chelsea are in action in the Women's Champions League. Elsewhere Juventus face Wolfsburg and Paris Saint-Germain take on Real Madrid.

Wednesday November 10

EUROPE: There's more action from the Women's Champions League, with holders Barcelona facing Hoffenheim, and Arsenal travelling to HB Koge in Denmark.

Thursday November 11

EUROPE: The final international window of 2021 convenes. The Republic of Ireland face Portugal and Greece take on Spain.
ASIA: Australia and Saudi Arabia, the top two sides in Group B of Asia's World Cup qualifying, meet.
SOUTH AMERICA: The clash of arch-rivals Uruguay and Argentina tops the billing in South America's next round of World Cup qualifying.

Friday November 12

EUROPE: Group I leaders England face third-placed Albania, Scotland can keep their dream alive with a trip to Moldova, while Italy face the Swiss in a Euro 2020 rematch.

Saturday November 13

EUROPE: Wales take on Group E's bottom team Belarus at home.
AFRICA: The final matchday of the second round of World Cup qualifying takes place, with key clashes including Algeria v Burkina Faso, Cameroon v Ivory Coast and South Africa v Ghana.
CONCACAF: Arch-rivals USA and Mexico meet in Cincinnati, while El Salvador play Jamaica in another crucial World Cup qualifier.

Sunday November 14

EUROPE: There's a key clash in Group H when the top two, Croatia and Russia, meet in Split. Similarly, Spain and Sweden go head-to-head at the top of Group B.

Monday November 15

EUROPE: England may have the chance to seal qualification in San Marino, while Scotland's campaign ends with a tough game against already-qualified Denmark.

Tuesday November 16

EUROPE: Netherlands and Norway meet at the top of Group G, and Wales host Belgium in Group E.
ASIA: Lebanon v United Arab Emirates will be Group A's key clash, while China must beat Australia to stay in the Group B race.
CONCACAF: Jamaica seek to cause a big upset when they host USA.
SOUTH AMERICA: Argentina take on rivals Brazil in Buenos Aires.

Wednesday November 17

EUROPE: Bayern Munich v Lyon is the headline fixture from another round of Women's Champions League games, while Arsenal are also in action against HB Koge.
CONCACAF: Canada host Mexico in another crucial World Cup qualifier in North America.

Thursday November 18

EUROPE: Wolfsburg face Juventus and Real Madrid host PSG in the Women's Champions League.
SOUTH AMERICA: The Copa Libertadores Femenina reaches the quarter-final stage.

Friday November 19

GERMANY: The Bundesliga returns after the international break with Bayern Munich visiting Augsburg.
INDIA: The 2021-22 ISL season begins, with ATK Mohun Bagan hosting Kerala Blasters.

Saturday November 20

URUGUAY: The final of the Copa Sudamericana takes place at the Estadio Centenario, Montevideo, between Brazilian sides Athletico Paranaense and RB Bragantino.
ENGLAND: The Premier League returns with Leicester City v Chelsea at lunchtime, followed by Liverpool v Arsenal in the evening.
GERMANY: It's the Berlin derby between Union and Hertha.
ITALY: In Serie A, Maurizio Sarri's Lazio take on his old club Juventus, while Fiorentina host Milan.
USA: The play-in rounds of the MLS final stages begin, with the other games taking place over the following two days.

Sunday November 21

ITALY: There's a massive clash at the top of Serie A, as champions Internazionale take on Napoli.
SPAIN: The Barcelona derby between Barca and Espanyol takes place the Nou Camp.

Tuesday November 23

EUROPE: In the penultimate round of the Champions League group stage, Villarreal host Manchester United and Chelsea face Juventus.
ASIA: The final of the AFC Champions League takes place.

Wednesday November 24

EUROPE: Manchester City face PSG for the second time this season, while Real Madrid travel to Sheriff Tiraspol seeking revenge for their Bernabeu defeat.

Thursday November 25

EUROPE: Europa League fixtures include Bayer Leverkusen v Celtic and Monaco v Real Sociedad.
USA: The first MLS Cup Conference semi-final takes place.

AFC Champions League... who will lift the 2021 trophy?

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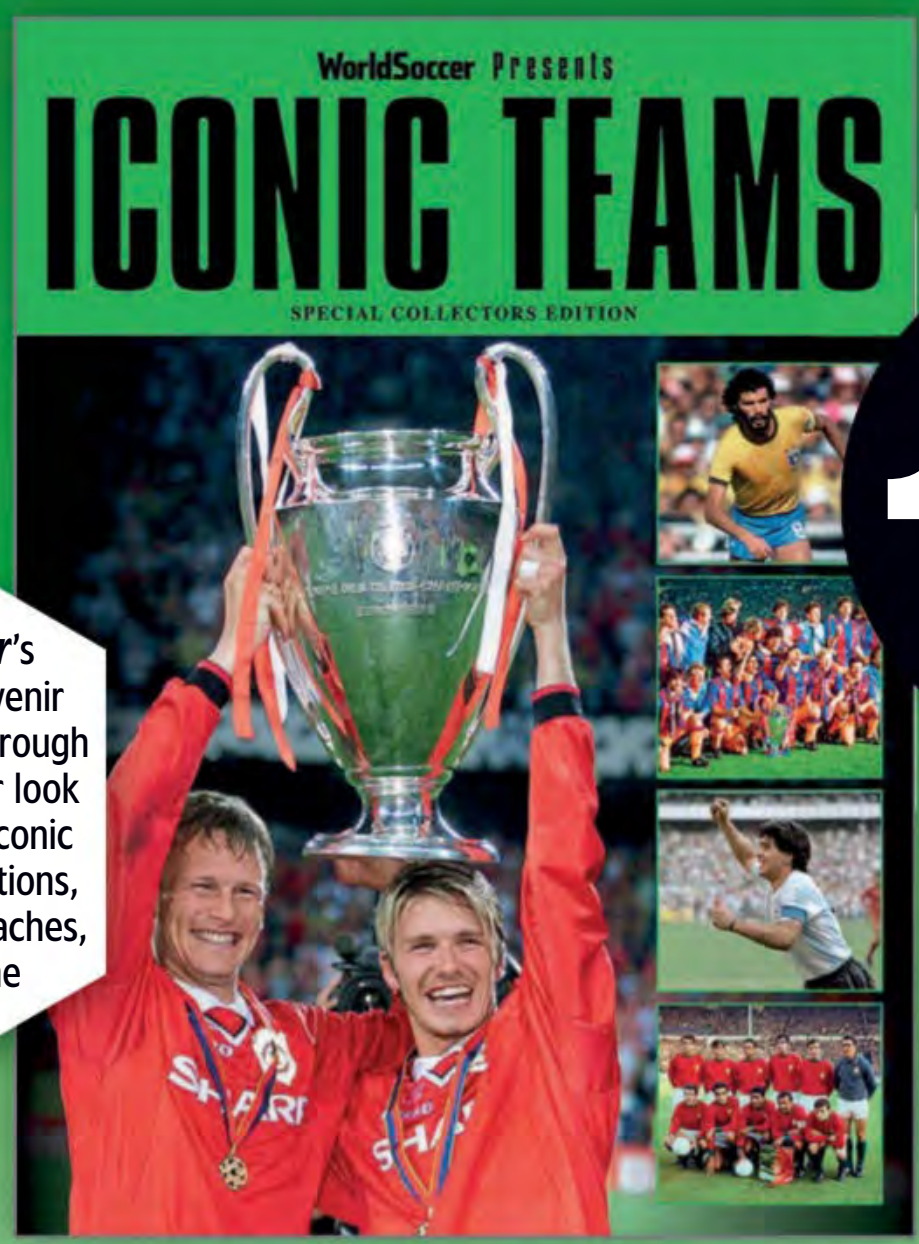

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13 Antonio **SIVERA** (25) 11.08.96
31 Jesus **OWONO** (Eqg) (20) 01.03.01

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2 **TACHI** (24) 10.09.97
3 Ruben **DUARTE** (25) 18.10.95
4 Matt **MIAZGA** (USA) (26) 19.07.95
5 Victor **LAGUARDIA** (31) 05.11.89
12 Saul **GARCIA** (26) 09.11.94
21 Martin **AGUIRREGABIRIA** (25) 10.05.96
22 Florian **LEJEUNE** (Fra) (30) 20.05.91
23 Ximo **NAVARRO** (31) 23.01.90
26 Abdel **ABQAR** (Mar) (22) 10.03.99
27 Javier **LOPEZ** (19) 25.03.02

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6 Mamadou **LOUM** (Sen) (24) 30.12.96
8 Tomas **PINA** (33) 14.10.87
14 Manu **GARCIA** (23) 02.01.98
15 Toni **MOYA** (23) 20.03.98
19 Ivan **MARTIN** (22) 14.02.99
20 Pere **PONS** (28) 20.02.93

FORWARDS
7 Mamadou **SYLLA** (Sen) (27) 20.03.94
9 **JOSELU** (31) 27.03.90
10 John **GUIDETTI** (Swe) (29) 15.04.92
11 Luis **RIOJA** (27) 16.10.93
16 Edgar **MENDEZ** (31) 02.01.90
18 Facundo **PELLISTRI** (Uru) (19) 20.12.01
24 **MIGUELIN** (22) 03.09.99
35 Alan **GODOY** (18) 04.05.03

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1 Unai **SIMON** (24) 11.06.97
13 Jokin **EZKIETA** (25) 17.08.96
26 Julen **AGIRREZABALA** (20) 26.12.00

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2 Alex **PETXARROMAN** (24) 06.02.97
3 Unai **NUNEZ** (24) 30.01.97
4 Inigo **MARTINEZ** (30) 17.05.91
5 **YERAY** (26) 24.01.95
12 Daniel **VIVIAN** (22) 05.07.99
15 Inigo **LEKUE** (28) 04.05.93
17 Yuri **BERCHICHE** (31) 10.02.90
18 Oscar **DE MARCOS** (32) 14.04.89
21 Ander **CAPA** (29) 08.02.92
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24 Mikel **BALENZIAGA** (33) 29.02.88

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6 Mikel **VESGA** (28) 08.04.93
8 Oihan **SANCET** (21) 25.04.00
14 Dani **GARCIA** (31) 24.05.90
16 Unai **VENCEDOR** (20) 15.11.00
19 Oier **ZARRAGA** (22) 04.01.99
22 Raul **GARCIA** (35) 11.07.86

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7 Alex **BERENGUER** (26) 04.07.95
9 Inaki **WILLIAMS** (27) 15.06.94
10 Iker **MUNIAIN** (28) 19.12.92
11 Jon **MORCILLO** (23) 15.09.98
20 Asier **VILLALIBRE** (24) 30.09.97
30 Nico **WILLIAMS** (19) 12.07.02
33 Nicolas **SERRANO** (18) 05.03.03

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13 Jan **OBLAK** (Svn) (28) 07.01.93
31 **CHRISTIAN** (21) 18.05.00

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15 Stefan **SAVIC** (Mne) (30) 08.01.91
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22 Mario **HERMOSO** (26) 18.06.95
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24 Sime **VRSALJKO** (Cro) (29) 10.01.92

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26 Javier **SERRANO** (18) 16.01.03

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8 Antoine **GRIEZMANN** (Fra) (30) 21.03.91
9 Luis **SUAREZ** (Uru) (34) 24.01.87
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17 Ivan **SAPONJIC** (Srb) (24) 02.08.97
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27 Giuliano **SIMEONE** (Ita) (18) 18.12.02

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1 Marc-Andre **TER STEGEN** (Ger) (29) 30.04.92
13 **NETO** (Bra) (32) 19.07.89
26 Inaki **PENA** (22) 02.03.99
36 Arnau **TENAS** (20) 30.05.01

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2 Sergino **DEST** (USA) (20) 03.11.00
3 Gerard **PIQUE** (34) 02.02.87
4 Ronald **ARAUJO** (Uru) (22) 07.03.99
15 Clement **LENGLET** (Fra) (26) 17.06.95
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20 Sergi **ROBERTO** (29) 07.02.92
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24 Eric **GARCIA** (20) 09.01.01
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28 Nico **GONZALEZ** (19) 03.01.02
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13 David **GIL** (27) 11.01.94
26 Juan **FLERE** (Arg) (23) 12.05.98

DEFENDERS
2 Jens **JONSSON** (Den) (28) 10.01.93
3 **FALI** (28) 12.08.93
4 Marcos **MAURO** (Arg) (30) 09.01.91
5 Varazdat **HAROYAN** (Arm) (29) 24.08.92
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16 Juan **CALA** (31) 26.11.89
19 Santiago **ARZAMENDIA** (Par) (23) 05.05.98
20 **IZA** (28) 23.04.93
22 Alfonso **ESPINO** (Uru) (29) 05.01.92
32 Victor **CHUST** (21) 05.03.00

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6 Jose **MARI** (33) 06.12.87
7 **SALVI** (30) 30.03.91
8 Alex **FERNANDEZ** (28) 15.10.92
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2 Hugo **MALLO** (30) 22.06.91
4 Nestor **ARAUJO** (Mex) (30) 29.08.91
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34 Fernando **MEDRANO** (21) 26.03.00

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9 **NOLITO** (34) 15.10.86
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28 Lluis **ANDREU** (22) 27.07.99

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22 Johan **MOJICA** (Col) (29) 21.08.92
24 **JOSEMA** (25) 06.06.96

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2 Gerard **GUMBAU** (26) 18.12.94
8 Raul **GUTI** (24) 30.12.96
15 Javier **PASTORE** (Arg) (32) 20.06.89
16 **FIDEL** (31) 27.10.89
17 **JOSAN** (31) 03.12.89
21 Omar **MASCARELL** (28) 02.02.93
23 Ivan **MARCONE** (Arg) (31) 03.06.90
26 John **NWANKWO** (21) 30.08.00
33 Jony **ALAMO** (20) 25.09.01

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7 Guido **CARRILLO** (Arg) (30) 25.05.91
9 Lucas **BOYE** (Arg) (25) 28.02.96
10 Pere **MILLA** (29) 23.09.92
11 Tete **MORENTE** (24) 04.12.96
12 Lucas **PEREZ** (33) 10.09.88
18 Dario **BENEDETTO** (Arg) (31) 17.05.90
20 Pablo **PIATTI** (Arg) (32) 31.03.89
29 Diego **BRI** (19) 12.09.02

COACH
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13 Diego **LOPEZ** (39) 03.11.81
34 Joan **GARCIA** (20) 04.05.01

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2 Miguelon **LLAMBRICH** (25) 18.01.96
3 Adria **PEDROSA** (23) 13.05.98
4 Leandro **CABRERA** (Uru) (30) 17.06.91
5 Fernando **CALERO** (26) 14.09.95
12 Oscar **GIL** (23) 26.04.98
15 David **LOPEZ** (31) 09.10.89
17 Didac **VILA** (32) 09.06.89
24 Sergi **GOMEZ** (29) 28.03.92
31 Lluis **RECASENS** (19) 19.02.02
33 Alvaro **GARCIA** (21) 01.06.00

MIDFIELDERS
6 Manu **MORLANES** (22) 12.01.99
8 Fran **MERIDA** (31) 04.03.90
10 Sergi **DARDER** (27) 22.12.93
14 Oscar **MELENDO** (24) 23.08.97
20 Keidi **BARE** (Alb) (24) 28.08.97
21 Nico **MELAMED** (20) 11.04.01
22 Aleix **VIDAL** (32) 21.08.89
25 Yangel **HERRERA** (Ven) (23) 07.01.98
32 **GORI** (19) 15.05.02

FORWARDS
7 **WU LEI** (Chn) (29) 19.11.91
9 Javi **PUADO** (23) 25.05.98
11 Raul **DE TOMAS** (26) 17.10.94
16 Loren **MORON** (27) 30.12.93
18 Landry **DIMATA** (Bel) (24) 01.09.97
19 Alvaro **VADILLO** (27) 12.09.94
23 Adri **EMBARBA** (29) 05.07.92

COACH
Vicente **MORENO** (46) 26.10.74

GETAFE

GOALKEEPERS
1 Ruben **YANEZ** (27) 12.10.93
13 David **SORIA** (28) 04.04.93
27 Diego **CONDE** (22) 28.10.98

DEFENDERS
2 Dakonam **DJENE** (Tgo) (29) 31.12.91
3 Erick **CABACO** (Uru) (26) 19.04.95
4 Allan **NYOM** (Cmr) (33) 10.05.88
6 **CHEMA** (29) 03.03.92
14 Jonathan **SILVA** (Arg) (27) 29.06.94
15 Jorge **CUENCA** (21) 17.11.99
17 Mathias **OLIVERA** (Uru) (23) 31.10.97
21 Juan **IGLESIAS** (23) 03.07.98
22 Damian **SUAREZ** (Uru) (33) 27.04.88
23 Stefan **MITROVIC** (Srb) (31) 22.05.90
33 **CHINCHU** (19) 05.03.02

MIDFIELDERS
5 Florentino **LUIS** (Por) (22) 19.08.99
11 Carles **ALENA** (23) 05.01.98
16 Jakub **JANKTO** (Cze) (25) 19.01.96
18 Mauro **ARAMBARRI** (Uru) (26) 30.09.95
20 Nemanja **MAKSIMOVIC** (Srb) (26) 26.01.95
24 David **TIMOR** (31) 17.10.89
30 John **PATRICK** (Irl) (17) 24.10.03
34 Diego **LOPEZ** (19) 21.10.01

FORWARDS
7 Jaime **MATA** (32) 24.10.88
8 **VITOLO** (31) 02.11.89
9 Jose **MACIAS** (Mex) (22) 22.09.99
10 Enes **UNAL** (Tur) (24) 10.05.97
12 Sandro **RAMIREZ** (26) 09.07.95
19 Dario **POVEDA** (24) 13.03.97

COACH
Quique **SANCHEZ FLORES** (56) 05.02.65

GRANADA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Luis **MAXIMIANO** (Por) (22) 05.01.99
13 **AARON** (26) 27.09.95
35 **ANDORINHA** (Por) (25) 02.02.96

DEFENDERS
2 Santiago **ARIAS** (Col) (29) 13.01.92
3 Sergio **ESCUDERO** (32) 02.09.89
6 **GERMAN** (34) 12.12.86
15 Carlos **NEVA** (25) 12.06.96
16 Victor **DIAZ** (33) 12.06.88
17 **QUINI** (32) 24.09.89
18 Luis **ABRAM** (Per) (25) 27.02.96
22 Domingos **DUARTE** (Por) (26) 10.03.95

MIDFIELDERS
4 Maxime **GONALONS** (Fra) (32) 10.03.89
5 Luis **MILLA** (26) 07.10.94
7 Alberto **SORO** (22) 09.03.99
8 Yan **ETEKI** (Cmr) (24) 26.08.97
14 **MONCHU** (22) 13.09.99
19 Angel **MONTORO** (33) 25.06.88
26 Isma **RUIZ** (20) 14.02.01

FORWARDS
9 Luis **SUAREZ** (Col) (23) 02.12.97
10 Antonio **PUERTAS** (29) 21.02.92
11 Darwin **MACHIS** (Ven) (28) 07.02.93
20 Carlos **BACCA** (Col) (35) 08.09.86
21 Ruben **ROCHINA** (30) 23.03.91
23 Jorge **MOLINA** (39) 22.04.82

COACH
Robert **MORENO** (44) 19.09.77

LEVANTE

GOALKEEPERS

1 Aitor **FERNANDEZ**	(30) 03.05.91
34 Dani **CARDENAS**	(24) 28.03.97
37 Pablo **CUNAT**	(19) 28.04.02

DEFENDERS

2 **SON**	(27) 30.03.94
3 Enric **FRANQUESA**	(24) 26.02.97
4 Rober **PIER**	(26) 16.02.95
6 Oscar **DUARTE** (Crc)	(32) 03.06.89
13 Shkodran **MUSTAFI** (Ger)	(29) 17.04.92
14 Ruben **VEZO** (Por)	(27) 25.04.94
15 Sergio **POSTIGO**	(32) 04.11.88
19 Carlos **CLERC**	(29) 21.02.92
20 Jorge **MIRAMON**	(32) 02.06.89
23 **COKE**	(34) 26.04.87
28 Jose **MANUEL**	(22) 25.02.99

MIDFIELDERS

5 Nemanja **RADOJA** (Srb)	(28) 06.02.93
7 Alex **BLESA**	(19) 15.01.02
8 **PEPELU**	(23) 11.08.98
10 Enis **BARDHI** (Mkd)	(26) 02.07.95
12 Mickael **MALSA** (Mtq)	(25) 12.10.95
17 Nikola **VUKCEVIC** (Mne)	(29) 13.12.91
22 Gonzalo **MELERO**	(27) 02.01.94
24 Jose **CAMPANA**	(28) 31.05.93
25 Pablo **MARTINEZ**	(23) 22.02.98

FORWARDS

9 Roger **MARTI**	(30) 03.01.91
11 Jose **LUIS MORALES**	(34) 23.07.87
16 Roberto **SOLDADO**	(36) 27.05.85
18 Jorge **DE FRUTOS**	(24) 20.02.97
21 Dani **GOMEZ**	(23) 30.07.98
29 Alejandro **CANTERO**	(21) 08.06.00

COACH

Paco **LOPEZ**	(54) 19.09.67

MALLORCA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Manolo **REINA**	(36) 01.04.85
13 Dominik **GREIF** (Svk)	(24) 06.04.97
31 Leo **ROMAN**	(21) 06.07.00
33 Pere **GARCIA**	(19) 01.01.02

DEFENDERS

2 Joan **SASTRE**	(24) 30.04.97
3 Brian **OLIVAN**	(27) 01.04.94
5 Franco **RUSSO** (Arg)	(26) 25.10.94
15 Pablo **MAFFEO**	(24) 12.07.97
18 Jaume **COSTA**	(33) 18.03.88
20 Aleksandar **SEDLAR** (Srb)	(29) 13.12.91
21 Antonio **RAILLO**	(29) 08.10.91
24 Martin **VALJENT** (Svk)	(25) 11.12.95
28 Marc **CARMONA**	(20) 08.01.01
29 Josep **GAYA**	(21) 07.07.00

MIDFIELDERS

4 Inigo **RUIZ DE GALARRETA**	(28) 06.08.93
6 Aleix **FEBAS**	(25) 02.02.96
8 Salva **SEVILLA**	(37) 18.03.84
10 Antonio **SANCHEZ**	(24) 22.04.97
12 Iddrisu **BABA** (Gha)	(25) 22.01.96
14 Dani **RODRIGUEZ**	(33) 06.06.88
16 Rodrigo **BATTAGLIA** (Arg)	(30) 12.07.91
19 Kang-In **LEE** (Kor)	(20) 19.02.01
27 Pablo **GALVEZ**	(19) 30.10.01

FORWARDS

7 Jordi **MBOULA**	(22) 16.03.99
9 **ABDON**	(28) 07.12.92
11 Lago **JUNIOR** (Civ)	(30) 31.12.90
17 Takefusa **KUBO** (Jap)	(20) 04.06.01
22 Angel **RODRIGUEZ**	(34) 26.04.87
23 Amath **DIEDHIOU** (Sen)	(25) 16.07.96
25 Matthew **HOPPE** (USA)	(20) 13.03.01
26 Fer **NINO**	(20) 24.10.00

COACH

Luis **GARCIA**	(48) 01.12.72

OSASUNA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Sergio **HERRERA**	(28) 05.06.93
13 Juan **PEREZ**	(25) 15.07.96
34 Yoel **RAMIREZ**	(19) 05.02.02

DEFENDERS

2 Nacho **VIDAL**	(26) 24.01.95
3 Juan **CRUZ**	(29) 28.07.92
4 Unai **GARCIA**	(29) 03.09.92
5 David **GARCIA**	(27) 14.02.94
15 Jonas **RAMALHO** (Ang)	(28) 10.06.93
16 **COTE**	(32) 05.09.89
23 **ARIDANE**	(32) 23.03.89
31 Unai **DUFUR**	(22) 21.02.99
32 Jesus **ARESO**	(22) 02.07.99
39 Manu **SANCHEZ**	(21) 24.08.00

MIDFIELDERS

6 **OIER**	(35) 25.05.86
7 Jon **MONCAYOLA**	(23) 13.05.98
8 Darko **BRASANAC** (Srb)	(29) 12.02.92
10 Roberto **TORRES**	(32) 07.03.89
12 Jaume **GRAU**	(24) 05.05.97
14 Ruben **GARCIA**	(28) 14.07.93
19 Javi **ONTIVEROS**	(24) 09.09.97
21 Inigo **PEREZ**	(33) 18.01.88
22 Roberto **IBANEZ**	(28) 22.03.93
24 Lucas **TORRO**	(27) 19.07.94
28 Javi **MARTINEZ**	(21) 22.12.99

FORWARDS

9 Ezequiel **AVILA** (Arg)	(27) 06.02.94
11 Kike **BARJA**	(24) 04.04.97
17 Ante **BUDIMIR** (Cro)	(30) 22.07.91
18 Kike **GARCIA**	(31) 25.11.89
20 Ivan **BARBERO**	(23) 17.08.98

COACH

Jagoba **ARRASATE**	(43) 22.04.78

RAYO VALLECANO

GOALKEEPERS

1 Luca **ZIDANE** (Fra)	(23) 13.05.98
13 Stole **DIMITRIEVSKI** (Mkd)	(27) 25.12.93
25 Ivan **ARBOLEDA** (Col)	(25) 21.04.96

DEFENDERS

2 Nikola **MARAS** (Srb)	(25) 19.12.95
5 Alejandro **CATENA**	(26) 28.10.94
19 Kevin **RODRIGUES** (Por)	(27) 05.03.94
20 Ivan **BALLIU** (Alb)	(29) 01.01.92
24 Esteban **SAVELJIC** (Arg)	(30) 20.05.91
27 Iker **RECIO**	(20) 17.06.01
32 Mario **HERNANDEZ**	(22) 25.01.99
33 Fran **GARCIA**	(22) 14.08.99

MIDFIELDERS

4 Mario **SUAREZ**	(34) 24.02.87
6 Santi **COMESANA**	(25) 05.10.96
9 Randy **NTEKA** (Fra)	(23) 06.12.97
12 Unai **LOPEZ**	(25) 30.10.95
17 Martin **MERQUELANZ**	(26) 12.06.95
18 Alvaro **GARCIA**	(28) 27.10.92
21 Pathe **CISS** (Sen)	(27) 16.03.94
23 **OSCAR**	(27) 20.08.94

FORWARDS

3 Radamel **FALCAO** (Col)	(35) 10.02.86
7 Isi **PALAZON**	(26) 27.12.94
8 Oscar **TREJO** (Arg)	(33) 26.04.88
10 **BEBE** (Por)	(31) 12.07.90
11 Andres **MARTIN**	(22) 11.07.99
14 Yacine **QASMI** (Mar)	(30) 03.01.91
16 Sergi **GUARDIOLA**	(30) 29.05.91
22 Jose **POZO**	(25) 15.03.96
29 Sergio **MORENO**	(22) 01.01.99

COACH

Andoni **IRAOLA**	(39) 22.06.82

REAL BETIS

GOALKEEPERS

1 Joel **ROBLES**	(31) 17.06.90
13 Rui **SILVA** (Por)	(27) 07.02.94
25 Claudio **BRAVO** (Chi)	(38) 13.04.83

DEFENDERS

2 Martin **MONTOYA**	(30) 14.04.91
5 Marc **BARTRA**	(30) 15.01.91
6 Victor **RUIZ**	(32) 25.01.89
15 Alex **MORENO**	(28) 08.06.93
16 German **PEZZELLA** (Arg)	(30) 27.06.91
19 Hector **BELLERIN**	(26) 19.03.95
23 Youssouf **SABALY** (Sen)	(28) 05.03.93
32 Fran **DELGADO**	(20) 11.07.01
33 Juan **MIRANDA**	(21) 19.01.00
37 Kike **HERMOSO**	(22) 10.08.99

MIDFIELDERS

3 Edgar **GONZALEZ**	(24) 01.04.97
4 Paul **AKOUOKOU** (Civ)	(23) 20.12.97
8 Nabil **FEKIR** (Fra)	(28) 18.07.93
10 Sergio **CANALES**	(30) 16.02.91
14 William **CARVALHO** (Por)	(29) 07.04.92
18 Andres **GUARDADO** (Mex)	(35) 28.09.86
21 Guido **RODRIGUEZ** (Arg)	(27) 12.04.94
22 Victor **CAMARASA**	(27) 28.05.94
28 **RODRI**	(21) 16.02.00

FORWARDS

7 **JUANMI**	(28) 20.05.93
9 Borja **IGLESIAS**	(28) 17.01.93
11 Cristian **TELLO**	(30) 11.08.91
12 **WILLIAN JOSE** (Bra)	(29) 23.11.91
17 **JOAQUIN**	(40) 21.07.81
20 Diego **LAINEZ** (Mex)	(21) 09.06.00
24 Aitor **RUIBAL**	(25) 22.03.96
27 **ROBER**	(20) 08.01.01
36 Jose **CALDERON**	(21) 07.01.00

COACH

Manuel **PELLEGRINI** (Chi)	(68) 16.09.53

REAL MADRID

GOALKEEPERS

1 Thibaut **COURTOIS** (Bel)	(29) 11.05.92
13 Andriy **LUNIN** (Ukr)	(22) 11.02.99
26 Luis **LOPEZ**	(20) 08.05.01
40 Toni **FUIDIAS**	(20) 15.04.01

DEFENDERS

2 Dani **CARVAJAL**	(29) 11.01.92
3 Eder **MILITAO** (Bra)	(23) 18.01.98
4 David **ALABA** (Aut)	(29) 24.06.92
5 Jesus **VALLEJO**	(24) 05.01.97
6 **NACHO**	(31) 18.01.90
12 **MARCELO** (Bra)	(33) 12.05.88
23 Ferland **MENDY** (Fra)	(26) 08.06.95
35 Miguel **GUTIERREZ**	(20) 27.07.01
43 **SANTOS**	(20) 03.01.01

MIDFIELDERS

8 Toni **KROOS** (Ger)	(31) 04.01.90
10 Luka **MODRIC** (Cro)	(36) 09.09.85
11 Marco **ASENSIO**	(25) 21.01.96
14 **CASEMIRO** (Bra)	(29) 23.02.92
15 Federico **VALVERDE** (Uru)	(23) 22.07.98
22 **ISCO**	(29) 21.04.92
25 Eduardo **CAMAVINGA** (Fra)	(18) 10.11.02
27 Antonio **BLANCO**	(21) 23.07.00

FORWARDS

7 Eden **HAZARD** (Bel)	(30) 07.01.91
9 Karim **BENZEMA** (Fra)	(33) 19.12.87
16 Luka **JOVIC** (Srb)	(23) 23.12.97
17 Lucas **VAZQUEZ**	(30) 01.07.91
18 Gareth **BALE** (Wal)	(32) 16.07.89
20 **VINICIUS JUNIOR** (Bra)	(21) 12.07.00
21 **RODRYGO** (Bra)	(20) 09.01.01
24 **MARIANO** (Dom)	(28) 01.08.93

COACH

Carlo **ANCELOTTI** (Ita)	(62) 10.06.59

REAL SOCIEDAD

GOALKEEPERS

1 Alex **REMIRO**	(26) 24.03.95
13 Mathew **RYAN** (Aus)	(29) 08.04.92
34 Gaizka **AYESA**	(20) 02.04.01

DEFENDERS

2 Joseba **ZALDUA**	(29) 24.06.92
6 Aritz **ELUSTONDO**	(27) 28.03.94
12 Aihen **MUNOZ**	(24) 16.08.97
15 Diego **RICO**	(28) 23.02.93
18 Andoni **GOROSABEL**	(25) 04.08.96
20 Nacho **MONREAL**	(35) 26.02.86
24 Robin **LE NORMAND** (Fra)	(24) 11.11.96
26 Jon **PACHECO**	(20) 08.01.01
30 Urko **GONZALEZ**	(20) 20.03.01
42 **CRISTO**	(21) 30.04.00

MIDFIELDERS

3 Martin **ZUBIMENDI**	(22) 02.02.99
4 Asier **ILLARRAMENDI**	(31) 08.03.90
5 Igor **ZUBELDIA**	(24) 30.03.97
7 **PORTU**	(29) 21.05.92
8 Mikel **MERINO**	(25) 22.06.96
11 Adnan **JANUZAJ** (Bel)	(26) 05.02.95
14 Jon **GURIDI**	(26) 28.02.95
16 Ander **GUEVARA**	(24) 07.07.97
21 David **SILVA**	(35) 08.01.86
27 Benat **TURRIENTES**	(19) 31.01.02
29 Robert **NAVARRO**	(19) 12.04.02

FORWARDS

9 Carlos **FERNANDEZ**	(25) 22.05.96
10 Mikel **OYARZABAL**	(24) 21.04.97
19 Alexander **ISAK** (Swe)	(22) 21.09.99
22 Ander **BARRENETXEA**	(19) 27.12.01
23 Alexander **SORLOTH** (Nor)	(25) 05.12.95
33 Jon **KARRIKABURU**	(19) 19.09.02
35 Julen **LOBETE**	(21) 18.09.00
37 Nais **DJOUAHRA** (Fra)	(21) 23.11.99
41 German **VALERA**	(19) 16.03.02

COACH

Imanol **ALGUACIL**	(50) 04.07.71

SEVILLA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Marko **DMITROVIC** (Srb)	(29) 24.01.92
13 **BONO** (Mar)	(30) 05.04.91
31 Javi **DIAZ**	(24) 15.05.97

DEFENDERS

2 Gonzalo **MONTIEL** (Arg)	(24) 01.01.97
3 Ludwig **AUGUSTINSSON** (Swe)	(27) 21.04.94
4 Karim **REKIK** (Ned)	(26) 02.12.94
16 Jesus **NAVAS**	(35) 21.11.85
19 Marcos **ACUNA** (Arg)	(29) 28.10.91
20 **DIEGO CARLOS** (Bra)	(28) 15.03.93
23 Jules **KOUNDE** (Fra)	(22) 12.11.98
26 Pablo **PEREZ**	(20) 18.08.01
30 Jose **ANGEL**	(19) 29.01.02

MIDFIELDERS

5 Lucas **OCAMPOS** (Arg)	(27) 11.07.94
6 Nemanja **GUDELJ** (Srb)	(29) 16.11.91
8 Joan **JORDAN**	(27) 06.07.94
10 Ivan **RAKITIC** (Cro)	(33) 10.03.88
14 Oscar **RODRIGUEZ**	(23) 28.06.98
18 Thomas **DELANEY** (Den)	(30) 03.09.91
21 Oliver **TORRES**	(26) 10.11.94
24 Papu **GOMEZ** (Arg)	(33) 15.02.88
25 **FERNANDO** (Bra)	(34) 25.07.87
34 Pedro **ORTIZ**	(21) 19.08.00

FORWARDS

7 **SUSO**	(27) 19.11.93
11 **MUNIR** (Mar)	(26) 01.09.95
12 Rafa **MIR**	(24) 18.06.97
15 Youssef **EN-NESYRI** (Mar)	(24) 01.06.97
17 Erik **LAMELA** (Arg)	(29) 04.03.92
22 Oussama **IDRISSI** (Mar)	(25) 26.02.96
36 Ivan **ROMERO**	(20) 10.04.01

COACH

Julen **LOPETEGUI**	(55) 28.08.66

VALENCIA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Jaume **DOMENECH**	(30) 05.11.90
13 Jasper **CILLESSEN** (Ned)	(32) 22.04.89
25 Cristian **RIVERO**	(23) 21.03.98
28 Giorgi **MAMARDASHVILI** (Geo)	(21) 29.09.00

DEFENDERS

2 Thierry **CORREIA** (Por)	(22) 09.03.99
3 Toni **LATO**	(23) 21.11.97
5 **GABRIEL PAULISTA** (Bra)	(30) 26.11.90
6 Hugo **GUILLAMON**	(21) 31.01.00
12 Mouctar **DIAKHABY** (Fra)	(24) 19.12.96
14 Jose **GAYA**	(26) 25.05.95
15 Omar **ALDERETE** (Par)	(24) 26.12.96
20 Dimitri **FOULQUIER** (Glp)	(28) 23.03.93
24 Cristiano **PICCINI** (Ita)	(29) 26.09.92
32 Jesus **VAZQUEZ**	(18) 02.01.03
34 **JOSEDA**	(19) 28.04.02
37 Cristhian **MOSQUERA**	(17) 27.06.04

MIDFIELDERS

4 Yunus **MUSAH** (USA)	(18) 29.11.02
8 Uros **RACIC** (Srb)	(23) 17.03.98
10 Carlos **SOLER**	(24) 02.01.97
18 Daniel **WASS** (Den)	(32) 31.05.89
23 **JASON**	(27) 06.07.94
27 Koba **KOINDREDI** (Fra)	(19) 27.10.01
36 Alessandro **BURLAMAQUI** (Per)	(19) 18.02.02

FORWARDS

7 Goncalo **GUEDES** (Por)	(24) 29.11.96
9 Maxi **GOMEZ** (Uru)	(25) 14.08.96
11 **HELDER COSTA** (Por)	(27) 12.01.94
16 Alex **BLANCO**	(22) 16.12.98
17 Denis **CHERYSHEV** (Rus)	(30) 26.12.90
19 Hugo **DURO**	(21) 10.11.99
21 Manu **VALLEJO**	(24) 14.02.97
22 **MARANHAO** (Bra)	(24) 20.10.96
33 Diego **LOPEZ**	(19) 13.05.02

COACH

Jose **BORDALAS**	(57) 05.03.64

VILLARREAL

GOALKEEPERS

1 Sergio **ASENJO**	(32) 28.06.89
13 Geronimo **RULLI** (Arg)	(29) 20.05.92
35 Filip **JORGENSEN** (Den)	(19) 16.04.02

DEFENDERS

2 Mario **GASPAR**	(30) 24.11.90
3 Raul **ALBIOL**	(36) 04.09.85
4 Pau **TORRES**	(24) 16.01.97
8 Juan **FOYTH** (Arg)	(23) 12.01.98
12 Pervis **ESTUPINAN** (Ecu)	(23) 21.01.98
18 Alberto **MORENO**	(29) 05.07.92
20 Ruben **PENA**	(30) 18.07.91
22 Aissa **MANDI** (Alg)	(29) 22.10.91
25 Serge **AURIER** (Civ)	(28) 24.12.92

MIDFIELDERS

5 Dani **PAREJO**	(32) 16.04.89
6 Etienne **CAPOUE** (Fra)	(33) 11.07.88
10 Vicente **IBORRA**	(33) 16.01.88
14 **TRIGUEROS**	(29) 17.10.91
17 Dani **RABA**	(25) 29.10.95
19 Francis **COQUELIN** (Fra)	(30) 13.05.91
23 Moi **GOMEZ**	(27) 23.06.94
28 Nikita **IOSIFOV** (Rus)	(20) 11.04.01

FORWARDS

7 Gerard **MORENO**	(29) 07.04.92
9 Paco **ALCACER**	(28) 30.08.93
11 Samuel **CHUKWUEZE** (Nga)	(22) 22.05.99
15 Arnaut **DANJUMA** (Ned)	(24) 31.01.97
16 Boulaye **DIA** (Fra)	(24) 16.11.96
21 **YEREMY**	(18) 20.10.02
24 Alfonso **PEDRAZA**	(25) 09.04.96

COACH

Unai **EMERY**	(49) 03.11.71

(Ages as of 29/10/21)

Internationals

2022 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

EUROPE Section

● *13 finals places available*

Group A

Oct 9 – Baku
Azerbaijan 0
Rep. of Ireland 3 (Robinson 7, 39, Ogbene 90)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Eskas (Nor)
Azerbaijan: Mahammadaliyev – Huseynov, Medvedev, Haqqverdi, Krivotsyuk (Dadasov 79), Bayramov (Abdullayev 63), Alasgarov (Seydayev 63), Mahmudov (Sadikhov 86), Qarayev, Ozobic, Emreli.
Republic of Ireland: Bazunu – Doherty, Omobamidele, Duffy, Egan, McClean, Cullen (Hourihane 90+3), Hendrick, Horgan (McGrath 46), Robinson (Parrott 90+3), Idah (Ogbene 59).

Oct 9 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Serbia 1 (Vlahovic 68)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Luxembourg: Moris – Jans, Chanot, Carlson, Pinto, O. Thill (Muratovic 90+2), Deville (Omosanya 74), Barreiro, S. Thill, Borges Sanches, Sinani.
Serbia: Rajkovic – Veljkovic, Nastasic, Pavlovic (Spajic 46), Duricic (Radonjic 46), Gudelj (Lukic 70), Milinkovic-Savic, Kostic (Lazovic 70), Tadic, Vlahovic, A. Mitrovic (Maksimovic 87).

Oct 12 – Faro
Portugal 5 (Ronaldo 8, 13, 87, Fernandes 17, Joao Palhinha 69)
Luxembourg 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)
Portugal: Patricio, Cancelo, Pepe, Dias, Mendes, Fernandes (Guedes 80), Palhinha (Neves 73), Moutinho (Mario 65), B. Silva (Nunes 80), Ronaldo, A. Silva (Leao 73).
Luxembourg: Moris – Jans, Chanot, Carlson, Pinto (Muratovic 87), O. Thill (Borges Sanches 46), Barreiro, Martins, S. Thill (Deville 46), Rodrigues, Sinani (Veiga 88).

Oct 12 – Belgrade
Serbia 3 (Vlahovic 30 pen, 52, Tadic 83 pen)
Azerbaijan 1 (Mahmudov 45+2)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Lambrechts (Bel)
Serbia: Rajkovic – Veljkovic, S. Mitrovic, Nastasic, Lazovic (Mladenovic 88), Grujic (Tadic 66), Lukic, Kostic (Radonjic 75), Milinkovic-Savic, Vlahovic (Maksimovic 88), Jovic (A. Mitrovic 65).
Azerbaijan: Mahammadaliyev – Huseynov Muttallimov 63), Medvedev, Haqqverdi, Krivotsyuk, Salahli, Mahmudov (Mustafayev 84), Qarayev, Ozobic (Alasgarov 73), Dadasov (Seydayev 73), Abdullayev (Nuriyev 73).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	7	5	2	0	16	8	17
Portugal	6	5	1	0	16	4	16
Luxembourg	6	2	0	4	5	14	6
Rep. of Ireland	6	1	2	3	8	8	5
Azerbaijan	7	0	1	6	4	15	1

Group B

Oct 9 – Batumi
Georgia 0
Greece 2 (Bakasetas 90 pen, Pelkas 90+5)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rumsas (Ltu)
Georgia: Loria – Kakabadze, Khocholava, Dvali, Giorbelidze, Aburjania (Davitashvili 90+1), Kankava, Lobzhanidze (Kvilitaia 90+2), Chakvetadze (Gvilia 60), Kvaratskhelia, Mikautadze (Okriashvili 60).
Greece: Vlachodimos – Androutsos, Chatzidiakos, Mavropanos, Tzavellas, Tsimikas, Bakasetas, Siopis (Manatolas 85), Bouchalakis, Masouras (Tzolis 78), Pavlidis (Pelkas 46).

Oct 9 – Solna
Sweden 3 (Forsberg 29 pen, Isak 62, Quaison 79)
Kosovo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Di Bello (Ita)
Sweden: Olsen – Krafth, Danielsson, Nilsson, Augustinsson, Claesson, K. Olsson (Eriksson 90+1), Ekdal (Cajuste 85), Forsberg (Svanberg 85), Kulusevski (Gyokeres 90+1), Isak (Quaison 75).
Kosovo: Muric – Hadergjonaj, Rrahmani, Aliti, Vojvoda (Domgjoni 73), Rashani (Muslija 87), Loshaj (Fazliji 87), Dresevic, Bytyqi (Selmani 70), Muriqi, Rashica.

Oct 12 – Pristina
Kosovo 1 (Muriqi 45 pen)
Georgia 2 (Okriashvili 11, Davitashvili 82)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Poland)
Kosovo: Muric – Vojvoda, Rrahmani, Fazliji, Aliti (Selmani 86), Halimi (Loshaj 74), Dresevic, Celina (Muslija 86), Rashani (Kastrati 59), Muriqi, Rashica (Bytyqi 73).
Georgia: Loria – Kakabadze, Kashia, Dvali, Lobzhanidze (Mamuchashvili 90), Gvilia, Kvekveskiri, Giorbelidze (Azarovi 80), Tsitaishvili (Chabradze 72), Kvaratskhelia (Davitashvili 72), Okriashvili (Kvilitaia 72).

Oct 12 – Solna
Sweden 2 (Forsberg 59 pen, Isak 69)
Greece 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)
Sweden: Olsen – Krafth, Lindelof, Danielsson, Augustinsson, Claesson (Svanberg 82), K. Olsson, Ekdal (Cajuste 82), Forsberg (M. Olsson 87), Quaison (Gyokeres 87), Isak.
Greece: Vlachodimos – Androutsos, Chatzidiakos, Mavropanos, Tsimikas, Giannoulis (Limnios 84), Bakasetas, Siopis (Pelkas 71), Bouchalakis, Masouras (Tzolis 71), Pavlidis (Douvikas 75).
Sent off: Chatzidiakos 86.

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden	6	5	0	1	12	3	15
Spain	6	4	1	1	13	5	13
Greece	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Georgia	7	1	1	5	4	12	4
Kosovo	7	1	1	5	4	14	4

Group C

Oct 9 – Vilnius
Lithuania 3 (Lasickas 18, Cernych 82, 84)
Bulgaria 1 (Despodov 64)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aranovskiy (Ukr)
Lithuania: Setkus – Vaitkunas, Satkus, Klimavicius, Baravykas, Megelaitis (Verbickas 67), Slivka, Lasickas, Cernych (Dapkus 90), Novikovas, Laukzemis (Kazlauskas 74).
Bulgaria: Lukov – A. Hristov, P. Hristov, Antov, Bozhikov, Vitanov (Chochev 60), Malinov (I. Iliev 60), Despodov, Nedelev (Yankov 87), Yomov (Delev 72), D. Iliev (Krastev 72).

Oct 9 – Geneva
Switzerland 2 (Zuber 45+3, Fassnacht 90+1)
Northern Ireland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)
Switzerland: Sommer – Mbabu (Widmer 80), Akanji (Schar 53), Elvedi, Rodriguez, Zakaria, Freuler, Steffen, Shaqiri (Sow 90+2), Zuber (Fassnacht 81), Embolo (Itten 90+2).
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell, McNair, Ballard, Cathcart, Brown (Ferguson 80), Lewis, Dallas (Bradley 86), Davis, Thompson (Jones 80), Saville, Washington (Magennis 62).
Sent off: Lewis 37.

Oct 12 – Sofia
Bulgaria 2 (Nedelev 53, 63)
Northern Ireland 1 (Washington 35)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Blr)
Bulgaria: Karadzhov – Turitsov, P. Hristov, A. Hristov, Velkovski, R. Tsonev (I. Iliev 46), Chochev, B. Tsonev (Malinov 73), Nedelev (Yankov 73), A. Iliev (Krastev 80), Despodov (Bozhikov, 90+3).
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell, Bradley (Jones 67), Ballard (McGinn 82), Cathcart, Flanagan, Ferguson, McNair, Davis, Thompson, Washington (Charles 82), Magennis (Dallas 57).

Oct 12 – Vilnius
Lithuania 0
Switzerland 4 (Embolo 31, 45, Steffen 42 Gavranovic 90+4)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Martins (Por)
Lithuania: Setkus – Baravykas, Satkus, Girdvainis (Gaspuitis 89), Barauskas, Slivka (Verbickas 46), Megelaitis (Armanavicius 89), Lasickas, Cernych (Veliulis 83), Novikovas, Laukzemis (Kazlauskas 46).
Switzerland: Sommer – Widmer, Schar, Elvedi, Rodriguez (Garcia 46), Sow, Freuler, Steffen (Fassnacht 68), Shaqiri (Gavranovic 76), Zuber (Vargas 68), Embolo (Itten 89).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	6	4	2	0	12	1	14
Switzerland	6	4	2	0	10	1	14
N. Ireland	7	2	2	3	6	10	8
Bulgaria	6	1	2	6	5	7	5
Lithuania	7	1	0	6	4	18	3

Group D

Oct 9 –Nur-Saltan
Kazakhstan 0
Bosnia & Herzegovina 2 (Prevljak 25, 66)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov – Bystrov (Murtazayev 84), Logvinenko, Maliy, Alip, Shomko (Beysebekov 78), Zhukov (Zhaksylykov 61), Kuat, Vorogovskiy (Orazov 78), Zainutdinov, Shchetkin (Omirtayev 61).
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic – Stevanovic, Ahmedhodzic, Kovacevic, Civic, Kolasinac, Cimirot (Nalic 63), Hadziahmetovic, Gojak, Dzeko, Prevljak (Demirovic 81).

Oct 9 – Helsinki
Finland 1 (Pukki 29)
Ukraine 2 (Yarmolenko 4, Yaremchuk 34)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Gil (Spa)
Finland: Hradecky – Alho (Hamalainen 62), Toivio, Arajuuri, L. Vaisanen, Raitala (Niskanen 78), Lod, Lam (Nissila 61), Kamara, Pohjanpalo (Riski 77), Pukki.
Ukraine: Pyatov – Tymchyk, Zabarnyi, Kryvtsov, Matvienko, Sobol (Kornienko 46), Stepanenko (Sydorchuk 77), Shaparenko, Tsygankov (Zubkov 77), Yarmolenko (Buletsa 86), Yaremchuk (Dovbyk 86).

Oct 12 – Nur-Saltan
Kazakhstan 0
Finland 2 (Pukki 45, 47)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ozkahya (Tur)
Kazakhstan: Shatskiy – Bystrov (Tapalov 79), Beysebekov, Maliy, Alip, Vorogovskiy (Taykenov 73), Zhukov (Zhaksylykov 58), Kuat, Vasiljev (Tagybergen 58), Omirtayev (Shchetkin 58), Zainutdinov.
Finland: Hradecky – Granlund (Raitala 79), L. Vaisanen, Ivanov, Hamalainen, Schuller, Kamara, Lod (Taylor 90+1), Nissila (Riski 90+2), Pohjanpalo (Jensen 33), Pukki (Valakari 79).

Oct 12 – Lviv
Ukraine 1 (Yarmolenko 15)
Bosnia & Herzegovina 1 (Ahmedhodzic 77)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Ukraine: Pyatov – Tymchyk, Zabarnyi, Kryvtsov, Matvienko, Sobol, Stepanenko Shaparenko (Sydorchuk 72), Tsygankov (Buletsa 82), Yarmolenko (Zubkov 82), Yaremchuk (Sikan 72).
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic – Stevanovic, Hadzikadunic, Ahmedhodzic, Civic, Nalic (Saric 58), Hadziahmetovic, Kolasinac (Kovacevic 90+1), Gojak (Prcic 58), Dzeko, Prevljak (Demirovic 83).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	6	3	3	0	8	3	12
Ukraine	7	1	6	0	9	8	9
Finland	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Bosnia & Herz.	6	1	4	1	8	7	7
Kazakhstan	7	0	3	4	5	12	3

Group E

Oct 8 – Prague
Czech Republic 2 (Pesek 38, Ward 49 og)
Wales 2 (Ramsey 36, James 69)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
Czech Republic: Vaclik – Mateju, Celustka, Kalas, Novak (Wiesner 84), Kral (Kuchta 83), Soucek, Pesek (Vydra 76), Barak (Sadilek 77), Hlozek (Zmrhal 90), Schick.
Wales: Ward – Gunter (C. Roberts 60), Mepham (T. Roberts 86), Rodon, Ampadu, N. Williams (Thomas 76), Allen, Morrell (Wilson 60), Ramsey, James, Moore.

Oct 8 – Tallinn
Estonia 2 (Sorga 57, Zenjov 90+3)
Belarus 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Hakim (Swe)
Estonia: Hein – Paskoti (Kallaste 87), Kuusk, Tamm, Mets, Sinyavskiy (Teniste 80), Vassiljev, Kreida, Kait, Anier (Ojamaa 81), Sorga (Zenjov 69).
Belarus: Pavlyuchenko – Selyava, Yudenkov, Bordachev (Pobudey 66), Begunov (Antilevskiy 81), Klimovich, Yablonskiy (R. Lisakovich 81), Bykov, Shevchenko (Pechenin 66), Solovey (Sedko 46), V. Lisakovich.

Oct 11 – Minsk
Belarus 0
Czech Republic 2 (Schick 22, Hlozek 65)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Letexier (Fra)
Belarus: Pavlyuchenko – Begunov, Selyava (Sadovnichiy 46), Yudenkov, Pechenin, Bykov, Klimovich (Solovey 78), Antilevskiy (R. Lisakovich 68), Sedko, Ebong, V. Lisakovich.
Czech Republic: Vaclik – Wiesner, Celustka, Zima, Mateju, Soucek, Sadilek (Zmrhal 88), Pesek (Kopic 81), Hlozek (Kuchta 88), Vydra (Pavelka 46), Schick (Kral 90+2).

Oct 11 – Tallinn
Estonia 0
Wales 1 (Moore 12)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)
Estonia: Hein – Teniste (Ojamaa 75), Paskoti, Tamm, Kuusk, Pikk (Sinyavskiy 57), Poom, Mets, Kait (Kallaste 82), Sorga (Kirss 81), Zenjov (Vastsuk 82).
Wales: Ward – C. Roberts (Gunter 83), Mepham, Rodon, Ampadu, Thomas, Allen, Wilson (Johnson 83), Ramsey (Morrell 80), James, Moore (Harris 71).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	6	5	1	0	21	4	16
Czech Rep.	7	3	2	2	12	9	11
Wales	6	3	2	1	8	7	11
Estonia	6	1	1	4	8	16	4
Belarus	7	1	0	6	6	19	3

Group F

Oct 9 – Glasgow
Scotland 3 (McGinn 29, Dykes 55, McTominay 90+4)
Israel 2 (Zahavi 5, Dabbur 31)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Scotland: Gordon – Patterson, McTominay, Hendry, Tierney, Robertson, McGregor, Gilmour (Cooper 90+5), McGinn, Adams (Christie 68), Dykes.
Israel: Marciano – Dasa, Abu Abaid, Bitton, Arad (Kinda 74), Menachem (Davidzada 87), Peretz, Natcho (Glazer 66), Solomon, Dabbur (Weissman 66), Zahavi.

Oct 9 – Torshavn
Faroe Islands 0
Austria 2 (Laimer 26, Sabitzer 48)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Peljto (Bih)
Faroe Islands: Gestsson – Rolantsson, Faro (K. Olsen 68), Nattestad, Davidsen (Agnarsson 68), Joenson (Bjartalid 68), Hansson, G. Vatnhamar, Hendriksson Olsen, Jonsson, Edmundsson (Frederiksen 86).
Austria: Bachmann – Trimmel, Ilsanker, Hinterreger (Posch 65), Alaba, Laimer (Ljubicic 77), Grillitsch, Sabitzer, Onisiwo (Schaub 77), Kainz (Demir 88), Kara (Gregoritsch 88).

Oct 9 – Chisinau
Moldova 0
Denmark 4 (Skov Olsen 23, Kjaer 34, Norgaard 39, Maehle 44)
HT: 0-4. **Ref:** Pinheiro (Por)
Moldova: Avram – Jardan, Posmac, Armas, Marandici, Ghecev (Potirniche 46), Ginsari (Dros 62), Rata, Ionita (Cotogoi 78), Iosipoi (Spataru 62), Nicolaescu (Puntus 79).
Denmark: Schmeichel – Wass, Kjaer (Vestergaard 46), Christensen, Maehle, Hojbjerg (Andersen 65), Norgaard, Delaney (Jensen 57), Skov Olsen (Dolberg 46), Damsgaard, Poulsen (Cornelius 77).

Oct 12 – Copenhagen
Denmark 1 (Maehle 53)
Austria 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Svk)
Denmark: Schmeichel – Wass (Norgaard 90), Christensen, Kjaer, Vestergaard, Maehle, Hojbjerg, Delaney (Jensen 90), Skov Olsen (Stryger Larsen 77), Damsgaard (Dolberg 44), Poulsen.
Austria: Bachmann – Trimmel, Posch, Hinterreger, Alaba, Ilsanker (Onisiwo 72), Grillitsch, Laimer (Kainz 83) Sabitzer, Grull (Gregoritsch 83), Kara (Schaub 72).

Oct 12 – Torshavn
Faroe Islands 0
Scotland 1 (Dykes 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jug (Svn)
Faroe Islands: Gestsson – Rolantsson, Faro, Vatnsdal (Ashkam 59), Nattestad, Davidsen (Knudsen 59), G. Vatnhamar, Hendriksson Olsen,

Hansson (Frederiksen 90+1), Jonsson, Edmundsson (K. Olsen 90+5).
Scotland: Gordon – Hendry (McGregor 68), Hanley, Tierney, Fraser (Patterson 83), McTominay, Gilmour (Cooper 89), McGinn, Robertson, Christie (Nisbet 83), Dykes.

Oct 12 – Be'er Sheva
Israel 2 (Zahavi 28, Dabbur 49)
Moldova 1 (Nicolaescu 90+5)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lva)
Israel: Marciano – Dasa (Podgoreanu 87), Abu Abaid, Bitton, Abu Hanna (Arad 46), Menachem, Peretz, Natcho (Kinda 64), Solomon, Dabbur (Abada 74), Zahavi.
Moldova: Avram – Jardan, Potirniche (Bolohan 11), Posmac, Armas, Reabciuk, Dros (Spataru 64), Rata, Ionita, Cociuc (Ginsari 46), Puntus (Nicolaescu 46).
Sent off: Reabciuk 85.

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark (Q)	8	8	0	0	27	0	24
Scotland	8	5	2	1	13	7	17
Israel	8	4	1	3	18	15	13
Austria	8	3	1	4	11	14	10
Faroe Islands	8	1	1	6	4	17	4
Moldova	8	0	1	7	4	24	1

Group G

Oct 8 – Gibraltar
Gibraltar 0
Montenegro 3 (Marusic 7, Beciraj 44 pen, 68)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Glova (Svk)
Gibraltar: Goldwin – Wiseman (Bosio 73), Annesley, R. Chipolina, Mascarenhas-Olivero, J. Chipolina (Britto 74), Walker (Badr 82), Ronan, Torrilla (Coombes 83), Valarino, Styche (Casciaro 62).
Montenegro: Mijatovic – Vesovic, Vujacic, Tomasevic, Radunovic, Marusic (Jankovic 73), Scekic (Bozovic 51), Kosovic (Vukcevic 73), Haksabanovic (Jovovic 73), Beciraj, Mugosa (Osmajic 45+1).

Oct 8 – Riga
Latvia 0
Netherlands 1 (Klaassen 19)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Madley (Eng)
Latvia: Ozols – Savalnieks, Cernomordijs, Dubra, Jurkovskis, Zjuzins (Karklins 84), Emsis (Stuglis 89), Jaunzems (Ontuzans 81), Kigurs (Krollis 84), Ciganiks, Uldrikis (Tarasovs 89).
Netherlands: Bijlow – Dumfries, De Vrij, Van Dijk, Blind, Klaassen, F. De Jong, Til (Gravenberch 62), Berghuis (Lang 62), Depay, Gakpo (Weghorst 76).

Oct 8 – Istanbul
Turkey 1 (Akturkoglu 6)
Norway 1 (Thorstvedt 41)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Turkey: Cakir – Celik, Aziz (Ayhan 70), Demiral, Erkin, Tufan (Kutlu 58), Ozdemir (Antalyali 70), Under (Yazici 70), Calhanoglu, Akturkoglu (Karaman 84), B. Yilmaz.
Norway: Nyland – Pedersen (Ryerson 84), Strandberg, Hanche-Olsen, Meling, Odegaard, Berg (Aursnes 75), Thorsby, Hauge (Daehli 75), Thorstvedt (Berisha 75), Elyounoussi.

Oct 11 – Riga
Latvia 1 (Demiral 70 og)
Turkey 2 (Dursun 75, Yilmasz 90+9 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)
Latvia: Ozols – Savalnieks, Cernomordijs, Dubra, Jurkovskis, Zjuzins (Tarasovs 60), Emsis, Jaunzems (Ontuzans 73), Uldrikis (Kigurs 60), Ciganiks, Gutkovskis (Krollis 81).
Turkey: Cakir – Celik, Demiral, Soyuncu, Erkin (R. Yilmaz 65), Ozdemir, Under, Kokcu (Dursun 65), Calhanoglu, Akturkoglu (Dervisoglu 74), B. Yilmaz.

Oct 11 – Rotterdam
Netherlands 6 (Van Dijk 9, Depay 21, 45+3 pen, Dumfries 48, Groeneveld 75, Malen 86)
Gibraltar 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Meshkov (Rus)
Netherlands: Bijlow – Dumfries, De Vrij, Van Dijk, Blind, Klaassen, F. De Jong (Weghorst 60), Wijnaldum, Berghuis (Groeneveld 60), Depay, Lang (Malen 78).
Gibraltar: Banda – Bosio (Ronan 46), Wiseman, R. Chipolina, Mascarenhas-Olivero, J. Chipolina (Britto 46), Walker (Badr 80), Annesley, Torrilla (Mouelhi 88), Valarino, Styche (Casciaro 62).

Oct 11 – Oslo
Norway 2 (Elyounoussi 29, 90+6)
Montenegro 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)
Norway: Nyland – Pedersen, Strandberg, Hanche-Olsen (Gabrielsen 88), Meling, Daehli (Johnsen 64), Odegaard (Gregersen 81), Berg, Elyounoussi, Hauge (Aursnes 46), Thorstvedt (Berisha 64).
Montenegro: Sarkic – Vesovic, Vujacic, Tomasevic, Radunovic (Beciraj, 82), Scekic (Jovovic 76), Marusic, Kosovic (Osmajic 46), Jankovic, Haksabanovic (Durdevic 67), Jovetic.
Sent off: Vesovic 90+4.

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Netherlands	8	6	1	1	29	6	19
Norway	8	5	2	1	15	6	17
Turkey	8	4	3	1	19	15	15
Montenegro	8	3	2	3	11	11	11
Latvia	8	1	2	5	8	13	5
Gibraltar	8	0	0	8	3	34	0

Group H

Oct 8 – Larnaca
Cyprus 0
Croatia 3 (Perisic 45+2, Gvardiol 80, Livaja 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
Cyprus: Michael – Psaltis, Andreou, Soteriou (Kakoullis 86), Ioannou, Avraam (Antoniades 60), Pittas (Tzionis 46), Artymatas (Kyriakou 69), Kastanos, Papoulis (Loizou 69), Sotiriou.
Croatia: Livakovic – Stanisic, Caleta-Car, Gvardiol, Sosa, Modric (Ivanusec 84), Brozovic (Jakic 84), Kovacic (Pasalic 63), Vlasic (Brekalo 68), Kramaric (Livaja 68), Perisic.

Oct 8 – Ta'Qali
Malta 0
Slovenia 4 (Ilicic 27, 60, Sporar 49, Sesko 67)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)
Malta: Bonello – Shaw, Pepe, Muscat, J. Mbong (Overend 68), Pisani (Caruana 68), Teuma, Attard, Dimech (Gambin 57), P. Mbong (Satariano 57), Montebello (Degabriele 80).
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicnik, Bijol, Mevlja, Balkovec, Cerin, Kurtic (Elsnik 82), Ilicic (Zahovic 72), Lovric (Stankovic 71), Verbic (Crnigoj 61), Sporar (Sesko 61).

Oct 8 – Moscow
Russia 1 (Skriniar 24 og)
Slovakia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)
Russia: Safonov – Sutormin, Diveev, Dzhikiya, Terekhov (Kudryashov 80), Kuzyaev, Barinov, Erokhin (Chistyakov 63), Bakaev (Zhemaletdinov 73), Zakharyan (Zabolotny 46), Smolov (Fomin 46).
Slovakia: Rodak – Pekarik (Suslov 80), Satka, Skriniar, Hancko, Kucka (Hrosovsky 64), Hamsik, Schranz, Duda (Rusnak 64), Haraslin (Almasi 80), Bozelnik (Strelec 64).

Oct 11 – Osijek
Croatia 2 (Kramaric 25, Modric 71)
Slovakia 2 (Schranz 20, Haraslin 45)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)
Croatia: Livakovic – Stanisic (Livaja 67), Vida, Gvardiol, Barisic, Ivanusec (Vlasic 46), Brozovic, Modric, Pasalic (Brekalo 60), Perisic, Kramaric (Susic 85).
Slovakia: Rodak – Pekarik, Satka, Skriniar, Hancko, Kucka (Jirka 85), Hrosovsky, Hamsik (Bero 41), Schranz, Haraslin (Koscelnik 72), Almasi.

Oct 11 – Larnaca
Cyprus 2 (Papoulis 6, Sotiriou 80)
Malta 2 (Muscat 53, Degabriele 90+8)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Higler (Ned)
Cyprus: Michael – Demetriou (Psaltis 86), Andreou (Pittas 79), Soteriou, Antoniades, Ioannou, Kyriakou (Gogic 79), Kastanos, Loizou (Kakoullis 61), Papoulis (Panayiotou 86), Sotiriou.
Malta: Bonello (Galea 82) – Attard (Shaw 57), Borg, Pepe, Muscat, Camenzuli, Caruana (Pisani 46), Teuma, Grech (Degabriele 71), P. Mbong (Dimech 71), Montebello.

Oct 11 – Maribor
Slovenia 1 (Ilicic 40)
Russia 2 (Diveev 28, Dzhikiya 32)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
Slovenia: Oblak – Karnicnik (Rogelj 86), Bijol, Mevlja, Balkovec, Cerin (Zahovic 86), Kurtic, Ilicic, Lovric, Verbic (Sesko 53), Sporar (Crnigoj 72).
Russia: Safonov – Sutormin, Diveev (Osipenko 36), Dzhikiya, Kudryashov, Fomin (Erokhin 86), Kuzyaev, Barinov, Al. Miranchuk (Zabolotny 78), Smolov (Zakharyan 78), Bakaev (Chistyakov 86).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Russia	8	6	1	1	13	5	19
Croatia	8	5	2	1	13	3	17
Slovakia	8	2	4	2	9	8	10
Slovenia	8	3	1	4	9	9	10
Malta	8	1	2	5	8	17	5
Cyprus	8	1	2	5	8	13	5

Group I

Oct 9 – Andorra la Vella
Andorra 0
England 5 (Chilwell 17, Saka 40, Abraham 59, Ward-Prowse 79, Grealish 86)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Monzul (Ukr)
Andorra: Gomes – C. Rubio, C. Garcia (Lima 31, E. Garcia 51), Vales, Llovera, M. Garcia, C. Martinez (Alaez 64), Rebes, X. Vieira, J. Rubio (Cervos 82), Sanchez (Cucu 64).
England: Johnstone – Trippier, Stones (Tomori 60), Coady, Chilwell, Foden, Ward-Prowse, Lingard (Mount 73), Saka, Abraham (Watkins 80), Sancho (Grealish 72).

Oct 9 – Budapest
Hungary 0
Albania 1 (Broja 79)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro (Spa)
Hungary: Gulacsi – Botka (Lang 83), Orban, A. Szalai, Nego (Hahn 83), A. Nagy (Kleinheisler 71), Schafer, Z. Nagy, Sallai (Vecsei 71), Szoboszlai, Salloi (Schon 58).
Albania: Berisha – Hysaj, Ismajli, Kumbulla, Djimsiti (Veseli 29), Trashi (Balliu 86), Bare, Gjasula, Cekici (Bajrami 46), Uzuni (Broja 66), Cikalleshi (Manaj 66).

Oct 9 – Warsaw
Poland 5 (Swiderski 10, Brolli 20 og, Kedziora 50, Ad. Buksa 84, Piatek 90+1)
San Marino 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Jovic (Cro)
Poland: Fabianski (Majecki 58) – Gumny, Helik, Kedziora, Frankowski (Bereszynski 66), Klich (Piatek 46), Linetty, Kozlowski, Placheta, Swiderski (Ad. Buksa 72), Lewandowski (Moder 66).
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Ma. Battistini, Simoncini, Brolli (Rossi 74), Palazzi (Fabbri 52), Mularoni, Censoni (Grandoni 46), A. Golinucci, E. Golinucci, Hirsch (D. Tomassini 46), Vitaioli (Bernardi 75).

Oct 12 – Tirana
Albania 0
Poland 1 (Swiderski 77)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Albania: Berisha – Hysaj, Ismajli, Kumbulla, Veseli, Trashi (Lenjani 65), Ramadani, Bare (Cokaj 78), Roshi (Bajrami 78), Uzuni (Broja 58), Manaj.
Poland: Szczesny – Dawidowicz, Glik, Bednarek (Helik 90+3), Jozwiak (Frankowski 71), Krychowiak, Zielinski, Moder (Klich 46), Puchacz (Bereszynski 90+1), Ad. Buksa (Swiderski 71), Lewandowski.

Oct 12 – Wembley
England 1 (Stones 37)
Hungary 1 (Sallai 24 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Hernandez (Spa)
England: Pickford – Walker, Stones, Mings, Shaw, Foden, Rice, Mount, Sterling (Henderson 76), Kane (Abraham 76, Watkins 90+2), Grealish (Saka 62).
Hungary: Gulacsi – Kecskes, Lang, A. Szalai, Nego (Bolla 90+3), A. Nagy, Schafer (Vecsei 79), Z. Nagy, Schon (Holender 68), Szoboszlai (Nikolic 90+2), Sallai (Hahn 79).

Oct 12 – Serravalle
San Marino 0
Andorra 3 (Pujol 10, Moreno 53, Cucu 89)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Meler (Tur)
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Ma. Battistini, Fabbri, Simoncini, Grandoni, Mularoni (Vitaioli 60), E. Golinucci, Censoni (Ceccaroli 68), A. Golinucci, D. Tomassini (Hirsch 68), Nanni.
Andorra: Alvarez – San Nicolas (De Pablos 90), Llovera, Alavedra, Cervos, C. Martinez (J. Rubio 84), Vales, Moreno (M. Vieira 77), Alaez, Cucu (Rebes 90), Pujol (X. Vieira 90).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	8	6	2	0	24	3	20
Poland	8	5	2	1	25	8	17
Albania	8	5	0	3	11	7	15
Hungary	8	3	2	3	13	12	11
Andorra	8	2	0	6	7	19	6
San Marino	8	0	0	8	1	32	0

Group J

Oct 8 – Hamburg
Germany 2 (Gnabry 52, Muller 81)
Romania 1 (Hagi 9)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Germany: Ter Stegen – Hofmann (Klostermann 85), Sule, Rudiger, Kehrer, Goretzka, Kimmich, Gnabry, Reus (Havertz 67), Sane (Adeyemi 89), Werner (Muller 67).
Romania: Nita – Ratiu, Rus, Chiriches, Burca (Manea 50), Tosca, Hagi (Maxim 60), Marin, Stanciu (Albu 82), Mihaila (Ivan 60), Puscas (Mitrita 82).

Oct 8 – Reykjavik
Iceland 1 (Johannesson 77)
Armenia 1 (Hovhannisyan 35)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Dabanovic (Mne)
Iceland: Olafsson – Saevarsson, Hermannsson (Gudjohnsen 68), Br. Bjarnason (Gretarsson 46), Skulason, Bi. Bjarnason, Palsson, Helgason (Ellertsson 90+2), Gudmundsson, Kjartansson (Johannesson 46), Thorsteinsson (Anderson 81).
Armenia: Yurchenko – Terteryan, Haroyan, Voskanyan, Hovhannisyan, Barseghyan (Geloyan 87), Udo, Spertsyan (Grigoryan 78), Mkhitaryan, Zelarayan (Bayramyan 64), Adamyan (Karapetyan 78).

Oct 8 – Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
North Macedonia 4 (Velkovski 39, Alioski 66 pen, Nikolov 74, Churlinov 83)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Frankowski (Pol)
Liechtenstein: B. Buchel – S. Wolfinger (Grunenfelder 79), Malin, Kaufmann, Hofer, Goppel, Sele (M. Buchel 75), F. Wolfinger (Yildiz 61), Hasler, N. Frick (Meier 46), Y. Frick.
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – S. Ristovski (Rakip 76), Velkovski (Zajkov 76), Ristevski, Alioski (Nikolov 70), Spirovski, Ademi (Askovski 70), Churlinov, Elmas, Trajkovski, M. Ristovski (Miovski 61).

Oct 11 – Reykjavik
Iceland 4 (Thordarson 19, Gudmundsson 35 pen, 79 pen, A. Gudjohnsen 89)
Liechtenstein 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Papadopoulos (Gre)
Iceland: Olafsson – Sampsted, Br. Bjarnason, Gretarsson (Hermannsson 32), Thorarinsson, Thordarson (A. Gudjohnsen 80), Bi. Bjarnason, Helgason (Baldursson 65), Gudmundsson, Kjartansson (S. Gudjohnsen 65), Thorsteinsson (Ellertsson 65).
Liechtenstein: B. Buchel – S. Wolfinger (Kardesoglu 84), Grunenfelder, Malin (Marxer 8), Hofer, Goppel, Sele (Yildiz 67), Frommelt, Hasler, Meier (N. Frick 46), Y. Frick (Brandle 84).
Sent off: Marxer 63.

Oct 11 – Skopje
North Macedonia 0
Germany 4 (Havertz 50, Werner 70, 73, Musiala 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – S. Ristovski (Askovski 77), Velkovski, Musliu, Alioski, Ademi (Spirovski 29), Kostadinov (Ristevski 77), Nikolov (Rakip 58), Elmas, Churlinov, Jahovic (Miovski 58).
Germany: Neuer – Klostermann, Sule, Kehrer, Raum, Goretzka (Wirtz 61), Kimmich, Gnabry (Hoffmann 74), Muller (Nehaus 80), Havertz (Adeyemi 61), Werner (Musiala 74).

Oct 11 – Bucharest
Romania 1 (Mitrita 26)
Armenia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Romania: Nita – Ratiu (Manea 66), Chiriches, Nedelcearu, Bancu, Cicaldau, Marin, Stanciu (Nedelcu 81), Hagi (Mihaila 81), Mitrita (Morutan 62), Keseru (Ivan 62).
Armenia: Yurchenko – Terteryan, Haroyan, Voskanyan, Hovhannisyan, Bayramyan (Adamyan 46), Grigoryan (Geloyan 46), Udo (Karapetyan 82), Mkhitaryan, Barseghyan (Zelarayan 46), Spertsyan (Vardanyan 77).

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany (Q)	8	7	0	1	23	3	21
Romania	8	4	1	3	11	8	13
N. Macedonia	8	3	3	2	15	10	12
Armenia	8	3	3	2	8	11	12
Iceland	8	2	2	4	11	15	8
Liechtenstein	8	0	1	7	2	23	1

ASIA Section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Third Round

Group A

Oct 7 – Ansan
South Korea 2 (Hwang In-Beom 47, Son Heung-Min 88)
Syria 1 (Kharbin 83)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Jassim (Qatar)

Oct 7 – Doha
Iraq 0
Lebanon 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Khudhayr (Ksa)

Oct 7 – Dubai
United Arab Emirates 0
Iran 1 (Taremi 70)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)

Oct 12 – Tehran
Iran 1 (Jahanbakhsh 76)
South Korea 1 (Son Heung-Min 48)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Kaf (Oma)

Oct 12 – Dubai
UAE 2 (Caio 38, Mabkhout 90+4)
Iraq 2 (Al Attas 74 og, Hussein 89)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sato (Jap)

Oct 12 – Amman
Syria 2 (Kharbin 20, Al Somah 64)
Lebanon 3 (Kdouh 45+1, 45+3, Saad 53)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Beath (Aus)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
South Korea	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Lebanon	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
UAE	4	0	3	1	3	4	3
Iraq	4	0	3	1	2	5	3
Syria	4	0	1	3	4	7	1

Group B

Oct 7 – Doha
Australia 3 (Mabil 9, Boyle 49, Duke 89)
Oman 1 (Al Awai 28)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Shukralla (Bhr)

Oct 7 – Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Buraikan 71)
Japan 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Makhadmeh (Jor)

Oct 7 – Sharjah
China 3 (Zhang Yuning 53, Wu Lei 75, 90+5)
Vietnam 2 (Ho Tan Tai 80, Nguyen Tien Linh 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Mohamed (UAE)

Oct 12 – Saitama
Japan 2 (Tanaka 8, Behich 85 og)
Australia 1 (Hrustic 70)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Jassim (Qat)

Oct 12 – Muscat
Oman 3 (Al Sabhi 45+1, Al Khaldi 49, Al Yahyaei 63 pen)
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Tien Linh 39)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Makhadmeh (Jor)

Oct 12 – Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 3 (Al Najei 15, 38, Al Buraikan 72)
China 2 (Aloisio 46, Wu Xi 87)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Tantashev (Uzb)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	4	4	0	0	8	3	12
Australia	4	3	0	1	8	3	9
Oman	4	2	0	2	5	5	6
Japan	4	2	0	2	3	3	6
China	4	1	0	3	5	9	3
Vietnam	4	0	0	4	4	10	0

AFRICA Section

● *5 finals places available*

Second Round

Group A

Oct 8 – Blida
Algeria 6 (Mahrez 27, 60 pen, Oumarou 47 og, Souleymane 70 og, Slimani 76, 88)
Niger 1 (Sosah 50)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Laryea (Gha)

Oct 8 – Marrakesh
Djibouti 0
Burkina Faso 4 (Tapsoba 45+2, 48, Kabore 51, Konate 60)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Sabilla (Uga)

Oct 11 – Marrakesh
Burkina Faso 2 (Dayo 30, Tapsoba 63)
Djibouti 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Corneh (Lbr)

Oct 12 – Niamey
Niger 0
Algeria 4 (Mahrez 21, Mandi 33, Bennacer 48, Bounedjah 54)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Sy (Sen)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	4	3	1	0	19	2	10
Burkina Faso	4	3	1	0	9	1	10
Niger	4	1	0	3	5	14	3
Djibouti	4	0	0	4	2	18	0

Group B

Oct 7 – Malabo
Equatorial Guinea 2 (Coco 35, Nsue 88)
Zambia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** El Jaafari (Mar)

Oct 7 – Rades
Tunisia 3 (Skhiri 15, Khazri 42, Jaziri 86)
Mauritania 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Weyesa (Eth)

Oct 10 – Lusaka
Zambia 1 (F. Sakala 65)
Equatorial Guinea 1 (Bikoro 82)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)

Oct 10 – Nouakchott
Mauritania 0
Tunisia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Charef (Alg)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	4	3	1	0	8	0	10
Equatorial Guinea	4	2	1	1	4	4	7
Zambia	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
Mauritania	4	0	1	3	1	6	0

Group C

Oct 7 – Accra
Liberia 1 (Harmon 45+3)
Cape Verde 2 (Monteiro 52, Rodrigues 90+2)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ouattara (Bfa)

Oct 7 – Lagos
Nigeria 0
Central African Republic 1 (Namnganda 90+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bou (Mtn)

Oct 10 – Mindelo
Cape Verde 1 (Mendes 90)
Liberia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Moussa (Nig)

Oct 10 – Limbe
Central African Republic 0
Nigeria 2 (Balogun 29, Osimhen 45+1)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Hakizimana (Rwa)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	4	3	0	1	6	2	9
Cape Verde	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Central African Rep.	4	1	1	2	2	4	4
Liberia	4	1	0	3	2	5	3

Group D

Oct 8 – Johannesburg
Malawi 0
Ivory Coast 3 (Gradel 36, I. Sangare 85, Boga 90+5)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Waweru (Ken)

Oct 8 – Douala
Cameroon 3 (Choupo-Moting 28, 51, Toko Ekambi 63)
Mozambique 1 (Catamo 81)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Marouf (Egy)

Oct 11 – Tangiers
Mozambique 0
Cameroon 1 (Ngadeu-Ngadjui 68)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Fadul (Sud)

Oct 11 – Cotonou
Ivory Coast 2 (Pepe 2, Kessie 66 pen)
Malawi 1 (Muyaba 20)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Camille (Sey)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	4	3	1	0	7	2	10
Cameroon	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Malawi	4	1	0	3	2	7	3
Mozambique	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

Group E

Oct 7 – Kigali
Rwanda 0
Uganda 1 (Bayo 41)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)

Oct 7 – Agadir
Mali 5 (A. M. Traore 8, Kone 22, 36, 45 pen, Doumbia 85)
Kenya 0
HT: 4-0. **Ref:** Essrayri (Tun)

Oct 10 – Nairobi
Kenya 0
Mali 1 (Kone 55)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ngwa (Cmr)

Oct 10 – Entebbe
Uganda 1 (Bayo 22)
Rwanda 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Guirat (Tun)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	4	3	1	0	7	0	10
Uganda	4	2	2	0	2	0	8
Kenya	4	0	2	2	1	7	2
Rwanda	4	0	1	3	1	4	1

Group F

Oct 8 – Luanda
Angola 3 (Zini 25, Ary Papel 56, Buatu 90+1)
Gabon 1 (Meye 83)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Djama (Dji)

Oct 8 – Alexandria
Egypt 1 (Marmoush 49)
Libya 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ndabihawenimana (Bur)

Oct 11 – Franceville
Gabon 2 (Aubameyang 74, Carneiro 84 og)
Angola 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** N'Diaye (Sen)

Oct 11 – Benghazi
Libya 0
Egypt 3 (Abou El Fotouh 39, Mostafa 45+4, Sobhi 72)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gomes (Saf)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Libya	4	2	0	2	3	5	6
Gabon	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Angola	4	1	0	3	3	5	3

Group G

Oct 9 – Bahir Dar
Ethiopia 1 (Kebede 67)
South Africa 3 (Mokoena 45+1, Mvala 71, Makgopa 90+1)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Abdulbasit (Lby)

Oct 9 – Cape Coast
Ghana 3 (Kudus 5, Partey 66, A. Ayew 87)
Zimbabwe 1 (Musona 49 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Atcho (Gab)

Oct 12 – Harare
Zimbabwe 0
Ghana 1 (Partey 31)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Omar (Egy)

Oct 12 – Johannesburg
South Africa 1 (Kebede 11 og)
Ethiopia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gatogato (Bur)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Ghana	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Ethiopia	4	1	0	3	2	5	3
Zimbabwe	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

Group H

Oct 9 – Lome
Togo 1 (Placca Fessou 56)
Congo 1 (Romao 21 og)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Toure (Gui)

Oct 9 – Thies
Senegal 4 (Gueye 10, Diedhiou 38, Mane 54, Keita 83)
Namibia 1 (Kamatuka 75)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Traore (Civ)

Oct 12 – Johannesburg
Namibia 1 (Shalulile 27)
Senegal 3 (Diedhiou 22, 51, 84)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Athoumani (Com)

Oct 12 – Brazzaville
Congo 1 (Mbenza 71)
Togo 2 (Placca Fessou 43, Denkey 77)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Houngnandande (Ben)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Senegal	4	4	0	0	12	3	12
Togo	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Namibia	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Congo	4	0	2	2	4	7	2

Group I

Oct 6 – Nouakchott
Sudan 1 (Teiri 72)
Guinea 1 (Kamano 7)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ibrahim (Lby)

Oct 6 – Rabat
Morocco 5 (Hakimi 31, Louza 45+1 pen, Chair 49, El Kaabi 62, Munir 82)
Guinea-Bissau 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Traore (Mli)

Oct 9 – Agadir
Guinea 2 (J. Kante 58, Bayo 67)
Sudan 2 (Al Tash 64, Kamal 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ghorbal (Alg)

Oct 9 – Casablanca
Guinea-Bissau 0
Morocco 3 (El Kaabi 10, 70, Barkok 20)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Ndala Ngambo (Cod)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	3	3	0	0	10	0	9
Guinea-Bissau	4	1	1	2	5	11	4
Guinea	3	0	3	0	4	4	3
Sudan	4	0	2	2	5	9	2

Group J

Oct 7 – Kinshasa
DR Congo 2 (Akolo 35, Mbokani 78)
Madagascar 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Dungula (Ang)

Oct 7 – Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 0
Benin 1 (Mounie 72)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alvacao (Moz)

Oct 10 – Cotonou
Benin 0
Tanzania 1 (Msuva 6)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Artan (Som)

Oct 10 – Antananarivo
Madagascar 1 (Rakotoharimalala 1)
DR Congo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Milazare (Mri)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tanzania	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Benin	4	2	1	1	3	2	7
DR Congo	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
Madagascar	4	1	0	3	3	6	3

CONCACAF Section

● *3.5 finals places available*

Third Round

Oct 7 – Austin
United States 2 (Pepi 49, 62)
Jamaica 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Radix (Grn)

Oct 7 – San Pedro Sula
Honduras 0
Costa Rica 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Escobar (Gua)

Oct 7 – Mexico City
Mexico 1 (Sanchez 21)
Canada 1 (Osorio 42)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Cornejo (Slv)

Oct 7 – San Salvador
El Salvador 1 (Hernandez 37)
Panama 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Nation (Jam)

Oct 10 – Kingston
Jamaica 0
Canada 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Herrera (Crc)

Oct 10 – San Jose
Costa Rica 2 (Ruiz 52, Borges 58 pen)
El Salvador 1 (Henriquez 12)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Martinez (Hon)

Oct 10 – Panama City
Panama 1 (Godoy 54)
United States 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)

Oct 10 – Mexico City
Mexico 3 (Cordova 18, Funes Mori 76, Lozano 86)
Honduras 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Elfath (USA)

Standings*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	5	3	2	0	8	3	11
United States	5	2	2	1	7	3	8
Panama	5	2	2	1	5	2	8
Canada	5	1	4	0	6	3	7
Costa Rica	5	1	3	1	3	3	6
El Salvador	5	1	2	2	2	5	5
Honduras	5	0	3	2	2	8	3
Jamaica	5	0	2	3	2	8	2

SOUTH AMERICA Section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Oct 7 – Montevideo
Uruguay 0
Colombia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)

Oct 7 – Asuncion
Paraguay 0
Argentina 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Daronco (Bra)

Oct 7 – Caracas
Venezuela 1 (Ramirez 11)
Brazil 3 (Marquinhos 71, Gabriel Barbosa 85 pen, Antony 90+5)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ortega (Per)

Oct 7 – Guayaquil
Ecuador 3 (Estrada 13, Valencia 16, 18)
Bolivia 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)

Oct 7 – Lima
Peru 2 (Cueva 36, Pena 64)
Chile 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ferreyra (Uru)

Oct 10 – La Paz
Bolivia 1 (R. Vaca 83)
Peru 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Ecu)

Oct 10 – Caracas
Venezuela 2 (Machis 45+1, Bello 64)
Ecuador 1 (Valencia 37 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

Oct 10 – Barranquilla
Colombia 0
Brazil 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

Oct 10 – Buenos Aires
Argentina 3 (Messi 38, De Paul 44, L. Martinez 62)
Uruguay 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)

Oct 10 – Santiago
Chile 2 (Brereton 69, Isla 72)
Paraguay 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)

Standings*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	10	9	1	0	22	3	28
Argentina	10	6	4	0	18	6	22
Ecuador	11	5	1	5	20	13	16
Uruguay	11	4	4	3	13	13	16
Colombia	11	3	6	2	16	16	15
Paraguay	11	2	6	3	9	13	12
Peru	11	3	2	6	10	18	11
Chile	11	2	4	5	11	14	10
Bolivia	11	2	3	6	13	25	9
Venezuela	11	2	1	8	8	19	7

2020-21 UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE

Semi-Finals

Oct 6 – Milan
Italy 1 (Pellegrini 83)
Spain 2 (F. Torres 17, 45+2)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Italy: Donnarumma – Di Lorenzo, Bonucci, Bastoni, Emerson (Calabria 72), Barella, Jorginho (Pellegrini 64), Verratti (Locatelli 58), Chiesa, Bernardeschi (Chiellini 46), Insigne (Kean 58). *Sent off: Bonucci 42.*
Spain: Simon – Azpilicueta, Laporte, P. Torres, Alonso, Gavi (Sergi Roberto 84), Busquets, Koke (Merino 75), Sarabia (Gil 75), F. Torres (Yeremi 49), Oyarzabal.

Oct 7 – Turin
Belgium 2 (Carrasco 37, Lukaku 40)
France 3 (Benzema 62, Mbappe 69 pen, T. Hernandez 90)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)
Belgium: Courtois – Alderweireld, Denayer, Vertonghen, Castagne (Batshuayi 90+2), Tielemans (Vanaken 70), Witsel, Carrasco, De Bruyne, E. Hazard (Trossard 74), Lukaku.
France: Lloris – Pavard (Dubois 90+2), Kounde, Varane, L. Hernandez, T. Hernandez, Pogba, Rabiot (Tchouameni 75), Griezmann, Benzema (Veretout 90+7), Mbappe.

Third Place Play-Off

Oct 10 – Turin
Italy 2 (Barella 46, Berardi 65 pen)
Belgium 1 (De Ketelaere 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)
Italy: Donnarumma – Di Lorenzo, Acerbi, Bastoni, Emerson, Barella (Cristante 70), Locatelli, Pellegrini (Jorginho 70), Berardi (Insigne 90+1), Raspadori (Kean 65), Chiesa (Bernardeschi 90+2).
Belgium: Courtois – Alderweireld, Denayer, Vertonghen, Castagne, Tielemans (De Bruyne 59), Witsel, Saelemaekers (De Ketelaere 59), Vanaken, Batshuayi, Carrasco (Trossard 87).

Final

Oct 10 – Milan
Spain 1 (Oyarzabal 64)
France 2 (Benzema 66, Mbappe 80)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Spain: Simon – Azpilicueta, Garcia, Laporte, Alonso, Gavi (Koke 75), Busquets, Rodri (Fornals 84), F. Torres (Merino 84), Oyarzabal, Sarabia (Yeremy 61).
France: Lloris – Pavard (Dubois 80), Kounde, Varane (Upamecano 43), Kimpembe, T. Hernandez, Pogba, Tchouameni, Griezmann (Veretout 90+2), Benzema, Mbappe.

2023 ASIAN CUP QUALIFICATION

Play-Off Round – 1st leg

Oct 7 – Buriram
Indonesia 2 (Rumakiek 16, Dimas 48)
Chinese Taipei 1 (Hsu Heng-Pin 90)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Heydari (Irn)

Oct 9 – Isa Town
Guam 0
Cambodia 1 (Vathanaka 26)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Yehia (Lbn)

Play-Off Round – 2nd leg

Oct 11 – Buriram
Chinese Taipei 0
Indonesia 3 (Egy 26, Kambuaya 55, Witan 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Arafah (Jor)
Indonesia win 5-1 on aggregate

Oct 12 – Isa Town
Cambodia 2 (Suhana 51, Sokpheng 55)
Guam 1 (Mendiola 36)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Habib (Bhr)
Cambodia win 3-1 on aggregate

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

Sep 25 – Washington
El Salvador 0
Guatemala 2 (Ramirez 19, Altan 21)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Bassue (Skn)

Sep 30 – Borg El Arab
Egypt 2 (Sherif 58, 67)
Liberia 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Srairi (Tun)

Oct 9 – Amman
Uzbekistan 5
Qatar 1
Ref: Unknown

Oct 9 – Faro
Portugal 3 (Ronaldo 37, Fonte 48, A. Silva 90)
Qatar 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** San (Sui)

Oct 9 – Muharraq
Curacao 1 (Janga 72)
New Zealand 2 (Tuiloma 9, Wood 33)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Bunafoor (Bhr)

Oct 12 – Amman
Jordan 3
Uzbekistan 0
Ref: Unknown

Oct 12 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 4 (Robinson 4, 13 pen, 53, Duffy 59)
Qatar 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Kennedy (Nir)

Oct 12 – Riffa
Bahrain 0
New Zealand 1
Ref: Unknown

Club Football EUROPE

2021-22 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Sep 15 – Manchester
Manchester City 6 (Ake 16, Mukiele 28 og, Mahrez 45+2 pen, Grealish 56, Cancelo 75, Jesus 85)
RB Leipzig 3 (Nkunku 42, 51, 73)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Gozubuyuk (Ned)

Sep 15 – Brugge
Club Brugge 1 (Vanaken 27)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Herrera 15)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Scharer (Sui)

Sep 28 – Leipzig
RB Leipzig 1 (Nkunku 5)
Club Brugge 2 (Vanaken 22, Rits 40)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Vincic (Svn)

Sep 28 – Paris
Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Gueye 8, Messi 74)
Manchester City 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Del Cerro Grande (Spa)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSG	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Club Brugge	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Manchester City	2	1	0	1	6	5	3
RB Leipzig	2	0	0	2	4	8	0

Group B

Sep 15 – Liverpool
Liverpool 3 (Tomori 9 og, Salah 49, Henderson 69)
Milan 2 (Rebic 42, Brahim 44)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Sep 15 – Madrid
Atletico Madrid 0
Porto 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Hategan (Rou)

Sep 28 – Milan
Milan 1 (Leao 20)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Griezmann 84, Suarez 90+7 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)

Sep 28 – Porto
Porto 1 (Taremi 75)
Liverpool 5 (Salah 18, 60, Mane 45, Firmino 77, 81)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	2	2	0	0	8	3	6
Atletico Madrid	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Porto	2	0	1	1	1	5	1
Milan	2	0	0	2	3	5	0

Group C

Sep 15 – Istanbul
Besiktas 1 (Montero 90+4)
B. Dortmund 2 (Bellingham 20, Haaland 45+3)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Sep 15 – Lisbon
Sporting 1 (Paulinho 33)
Ajax 5 (Haller 2, 9, 51, 63, Berghuis 39)
HT: 1-3. **Ref:** Sanchez Martinez (Spa)

Sep 28 – Amsterdam
Ajax 2 (Berghuis 17, Haller 43)
Besiktas 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Bastien (Fra)

Sep 28 – Dortmund
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Malen 37)
Sporting 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Jovanovic (Srb)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
B. Dortmund	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Besiktas	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Sporting	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Group D

Sep 15 – Tiraspol
Sheriff Tiraspol 2 (Traore 16, Yansane 62)
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)

Sep 15 – Milan
Internazionale 0
Real Madrid 1 (Rodrygo 89)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Siebert (Ger)

Sep 28 – Kiev
Shakhtar Donetsk 0
Internazionale 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kovacs (Rou)

Sep 28 – Madrid
Real Madrid 1 (Benzema 65 pen)
Sheriff Tiraspol 2 (Yakhshiboev 25, Thill 90)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Visser (Bel)

**(Tables correct as of 12.10.21)*

World Service

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff Tiraspol	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Real Madrid	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Internazionale	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Shakhtar	2	0	1	1	0	2	1

Group E

Sep 14 – Barcelona
Barcelona 0
Bayern Munich 3 (Muller 34, Lewandowski 56, 85)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)

Sep 14 – Kiev
Dynamo Kiev 0
Benfica 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)

Sep 29 – Lisbon
Benfica 3 (Nunez 3, 79 pen, Rafa Silva 69)
Barcelona 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)

Sep 29 – Munich
Bayern Munich 5 (Lewandowski 12 pen, 27, Gnabry 68, Sane 74, Choupo-Moting 87)
Dynamo Kiev 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Guida (Ita)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	2	2	0	0	8	0	6
Benfica	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Dynamo Kiev	2	0	1	1	0	5	1
Barcelona	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

Group F

Sep 14 – Berne
Young Boys 2 (Ngamaleu 66, Siebatcheu 90+5)
Manchester United 1 (Ronaldo 13)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Letexier (Fra)

Sep 14 – Villarreal
Villarreal 2 (Trigueros 39, Danjuma 73)
Atalanta 2 (Freuler 6, Gosens 83)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

Sep 29 – Bergamo
Atalanta 1 (Pessina 68)
Young Boys 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)

Sep 29 – Manchester
Manchester United 2 (Alex Telles 60, Ronaldo 90+5)
Villarreal 1 (Alcacer 53)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atalanta	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Young Boys	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Manchester Utd	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Villarreal	2	0	1	1	3	4	1

Group G

Sep 14 – Seville
Sevilla 1 (Rakitic 42 pen)
Red Bull Salzburg 1 (Sucic 21 pen)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Kulbakov (Blr)

Sep 14 – Lille
Lille 0
Wolfsburg 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Makkelie (Ned)

Sep 29 – Salzburg
Red Bull Salzburg 2 (Adeyemi 35 pen, 53 pen)
Lille 1 (Yilmaz 62)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Meler (Tur)

Sep 29 – Wolfsburg
Wolfsburg 1 (Steffen 48)
Sevilla 1 (Rakitic 87 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kabakov (Bul)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RB Salzburg	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Sevilla	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Wolfsburg	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Lille	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Group H

Sep 14 – London
Chelsea 1 (Lukaku 69)
Zenit 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Frankowski (Pol)

Sep 14 – Malmo
Malmo 0
Juventus 3 (Alex Sandro 23, Dybala 45 pen, Morata 45+1)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Dias (Por)

Sep 29 – Saint-Petersburg
Zenit 4 (Claudinho 9, Kuzyaev 49, Sutormin 80, Wendel 90+4)
Malmo 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)

Sep 29 – Turin
Juventus 1 (Chiesa 46)
Chelsea 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Manzano (Spa)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Chelsea	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Zenit	2	1	0	1	4	1	3
Malmo	2	0	0	2	0	7	0

2021-22 EUROPA LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Sep 16 – Glasgow
Rangers 0
Lyon 2 (Toko Ekambi 23, Tavernier 55 og)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ekberg (Swe)

Sep 16 – Brondby
Brondby 0
Sparta Prague 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Stavrev (Mkd)

Sep 30 – Lyon
Lyon 3 (Toko Ekambi 64, 71, Aouar 86)
Brondby 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)

Sep 30 – Prague
Sparta Prague 1 (Hancko 29)
Rangers 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Sparta Prague	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Brondby	2	0	1	1	0	3	1
Rangers	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

Group B

Sep 16 – Eindhoven
PSV 2 (Gotze 32, Gakpo 54)
Real Sociedad 2 (Januzaj 34, Isak 39)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)

Sep 16 – Monaco
Monaco 1 (Diatta 66)
Sturm Graz 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rumsas (Ltu)

Sep 30 – San Sebastian
Real Sociedad 1 (Merino 53)
Monaco 1 (Disasi 16)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Ivanov (Rus)

Sep 30 – Graz
Sturm Graz 1 (Stankovic 55)
PSV 4 (Sangare 32, Zahavi 51, Max 74, Vertessen 78)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Aranovskyi (Ukr)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	2	1	1	0	6	3	4
Monaco	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Real Sociedad	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Sturm Graz	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group C

Sep 15 – Moscow
Spartak Moscow 0
Legia Warsaw 1 (Kastrati 90+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Dabanovic (Mne)

Sep 16 – Leicester
Leicester City 2 (Perez 9, Barnes 64)
Napoli 2 (Osimhen 69, 87)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Martins (Por)

Sep 30 – Naples
Napoli 2 (Elmas 1, Osimhen 90+4)
Spartak Moscow 3 (Promes 55, 90, Ignatov 80)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Kruzliak (Svk)

Sep 30 – Warsaw
Legia Warsaw 1 (Emreli 31)
Leicester City 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Bebek (Cro)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Legia Warsaw	2	2	0	0	2	0	6
Spartak Moscow	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Napoli	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
Leicester City	2	0	1	1	2	3	1

Group D

Sep 16 – Frankfurt
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Lammers 41)
Fenerbahce 1 (Ozil 10)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Mariani (Ita)

Sep 16 – Piraeus
Olympiakos 2 (El-Arabi 52, Reabciuk 87)
Antwerp 1 (Samatta 75)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Bognar (Hun)

Sep 30 – Antwerp
Antwerp 0
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Pacienca 90+1 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kehlet (Den)

Sep 30 – Istanbul
Fenerbahce 0
Olympiakos 3 (Soares 6, Masouras 63, 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Hernandez (Spa)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
E. Frankfurt	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Fenerbahce	2	0	1	1	1	4	1
Antwerp	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Group E

Sep 16 – Moscow
Lokomotiv Moscow 1 (Anjorin 89)
Marseille 1 (Under 59 pen)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Peljto (Bih)

Sep 16 – Istanbul
Galatasaray 1 (Strakosha 67 og)
Lazio 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jug (Svn)

Sep 30 – Rome
Lazio 2 (Basic 13, Patric 38)
Lokomotiv Moscow 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Pawson (Eng)

Sep 30 – Marseille
Marseille 0
Galatasaray 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Raczkowski (Pol)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Lazio	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
Lokomotiv	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Marseille	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Group F

Sep 16 – Herning
Midtjylland 1 (Isaksen 3)
Ludogorets 1 (Despodov 32)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Aghayev (Aze)

Sep 16 – Belgrade
Red Star Belgrade 2 (Rodic 75, Katai 85 pen)
Braga 1 (Galeno 76)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Beaton (Sco)

Sep 30 – Razgrad
Ludogorets 0
Red Star Belgrade 1 (Kanga 64)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Brisard (Fra)

Sep 30 – Braga
Braga 3 (Galeno 55 pen, 90+5, R. Horta 62)
Midtjylland 1 (Evander 19 pen)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Frappart (Fra)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Braga	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Ludogorets	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Midtjylland	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Group G

Sep 16 – Leverkusen
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Palacios 37, Wirtz 69)
Ferencvaros 1 (R. Mmaee 8)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Treimanos (Lva)

Sep 16 – Seville
Real Betis 4 (Miranda 32, Juanmi 35, 53, Iglesias 51)
Celtic 3 (Ajeti 15, Juranovic 27 pen, Ralston 87)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Jovic (Cro)

Sep 30 – Glasgow
Celtic 0
Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Hincapie 25, Wirtz 35, Alario 58 pen, Adil 90+4)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Di Bello (Ita)

Sep 30 – Budapest
Ferencvaros 1 (Uzuni 44)
Real Betis 3 (Fekir 17, Wingo 76 og, Tello 90+5)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Reinshreiber (Isr)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
B. Leverkusen	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Real Betis	2	2	0	0	7	4	6
Ferencvaros	2	0	0	2	2	5	0
Celtic	2	0	0	2	3	8	0

Group H

Sep 16 – Zagreb
Dinamo Zagreb 0
West Ham United 2 (Antonio 22, Rice 50)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)

Sep 16 – Vienna
Rapid Vienna 0
Genk 1 (Onuachu 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tohver (Est)

Sep 30 – Genk
Genk 0
Dinamo Zagreb 3 (Ivanusec 10, Petkovic 45+3, 67 pen)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Gestranius (Fin)

Sep 30 – London
West Ham United 2 (Rice 29, Benrahma 90+4)
Rapid Vienna 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Stieler (Ger)

Current standings	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
West Ham	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Dinamo Zagreb	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Genk	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Rapid Vienna	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

2021-22 EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Group Stage

Group A

Sep 14 – Tel Aviv
Maccabi Tel Aviv 4 (Perica 13, Kanichowsky 32, Biton 45+3, Hozez 72)
Alashkert 1 (Embalo 17)
HT: 3-1. **Ref:** Eskas (Nor)

Sep 16 – Helsinki
HJK 0
LASK 2 (Maresic 17, Monschein 89)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)

Sep 30 – Klagenfurt
LASK 1 (Horvath 10)
Maccabi Tel Aviv 1 (Shamir 88)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Balakin (Ukr)

Sep 30 – Yerevan
Alashkert 2 (Embalo 24, Glisic 90+3)
HJK 4 (Ri. Riski 8, Valencic 57, Ro. Riski 63, Olusanya 90+4)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Fesnic (Rou)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maccabi Tel Aviv	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
LASK	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
HJK	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Alashkert	2	0	0	2	3	8	0

Group B

Sep 16 – Tallinn
Flora 0
Gent 1 (Lemajic 54)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Cann (Mal)

Sep 16 – Larnaca
Anorthosis Famagusta 0
Partizan Belgrade 2 (Menig 42, Gomes 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Kjaersgaard (Den)

Sep 30 – Gent
Gent 2 (Correa 28 og, Kums 81)
Anorthosis Famagusta 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Glova (Svk)

Sep 30 – Belgrade
Partizan Belgrade 2 (Markovic 20, 42)
Flora 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Weinberger (Aut)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Gent	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Flora	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Anorthosis	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Group C

Sep 16 – Rome
Roma 5 (Pellegrini 25, 62, El Shaarawy 38, Mancini 82, Abraham 84)
CSKA Sofia 1 (Carey 10)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Nyberg (Swe)

Sep 16 – Bodo
Bodo/Glimt 3 (Saltnes 48, Solbakken 49, Pellegrino 60)
Zorya Luhansk 1 (Hromov 90+1)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Higler (Ned)

Sep 30 – Zaporizhzhia
Zorya Luhansk 0
Roma 3 (El Shaarawy 7, Smalling 66, Abraham 68)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Godinho (Por)

Sep 30 – Sofia
CSKA Sofia 0
Bodo/Glimt 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Anufrijevs (Lva)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma	2	2	0	0	8	1	6
Bodo/Glimt	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
CSKA Sofia	2	0	1	1	1	5	1
Zorya Luhansk	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Group D

Sep 16 – Jablonec
Jablonec 1 (Pilar 51 pen)
CFR Cluj 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Jogji (Alb)

Sep 16 – Randers
Randers 2 (Piesinger 27, Graves 68)
AZ 2 (Clasie 24, Pavlidis 34)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Strukan (Cro)

Sep 30 – Alkmaar
AZ 1 (Gudmundsson 53)
Jablonec 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Obrenovic (Svn)

Sep 30 – Cluj
CFR Cluj 1 (Petrila 68)
Randers 1 (Kamara 41)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Massa (Ita)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Jablonec	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Randers	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
CFR Cluj	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

Group E

Sep 14 – Haifa
Maccabi Haifa 0
Feyenoord 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Maresca (Ita)

Sep 16 – Prague
Slavia Prague 3 (Bah 18, Kuchta 84, Schranz 88)
Union Berlin 1 (Behrens 70)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Verissimo (Por)

Sep 30 – Rotterdam
Feyenoord 2 (Kokcu 14, Linssen 24)
Slavia Prague 1 (Holes 63)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Petrescu (Rou)

Sep 30 – Berlin
Union Berlin 3 (Voglsammer 33, Behrens 48, Awoniyi 76)
Maccabi Haifa 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Walsh (Sco)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Feyenoord	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Slavia Prague	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Union Berlin	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Maccabi Haifa	2	0	1	1	0	3	1

Group F

Sep 16 – Bratislava
Slovan Bratislava 1 (Henty 21)
Copenhagen 3 (Wind 18, 68 pen, Stage 41)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Fabbri (Ita)

Sep 16 – Gibraltar
Lincoln Red Imps 0
PAOK 2 (Akpom 45+2, Mitrita 56)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Harvey (Irl)

Sep 30 – Copenhagen
Copenhagen 3 (R. Chipolina 4 og, Wind 45+1 pen, Stage 52)
Lincoln Red Imps 1 (Rosa 33)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** Monzul (Ukr)

Sep 30 – Thessaloniki
PAOK 1 (Akpom 9)
Slovan Bratislava 1 (Green 15)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Pinheiro (Por)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	2	2	0	0	6	2	6
PAOK	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Slovan Bratislava	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Lincoln Red Imps	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group G

Sep 16 – Rennes
Rennes 2 (Tait 23, Laborde 72)
Tottenham Hotspur 2 (Bade 11 og, Hojbjerg 76)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ozkahya (Tur)

Sep 16 – Maribor
Mura 0
Vitesse 2 (Tronstad 30, Doekhi 69)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al-Hakim (Swe)

Sep 30 – London
Tottenham Hotspur 5 (Alli 4 pen, Lo Celso 8, Kane 68, 76, 87)
Mura 1 (Kous 53)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Frid (Isr)

Sep 30 – Arnhem
Vitesse 1 (Wittek 30)
Rennes 2 (Guirassy 54 pen, Kamaldeen 70)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Clancy (Sco)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tottenham	2	1	1	0	7	3	4
Rennes	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Vitesse	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Mura	2	0	0	2	1	7	0

Group H

Sep 16 – Almaty
Kairat 0
Omonia Nicosia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Boiko (Ukr)

Sep 16 – Baku
Qarabag 0
Basel 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Lambrechts (Bel)

Sep 30 – Basel
Basel 4 (Arthur 15, Lang 21, 40, Ndoye 49)
Kairat 2 (Kante 65, Alves 69 pen)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Attwell (Eng)

Sep 30 – Nicosia
Omonia Nicosia 1 (Lecjaks 40)
Qarabag 4 (Kady 52, 90+4, Sheydaev 73, Medvedev 79 pen)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Madden (Sco)

Current standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Qarabag	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Basel	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Kairat	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
Omonia	2	0	1	1	1	4	1

SOUTH AMERICA

2021 COPA LIBERTADORES

Semi-Finals – 1st Leg

Sep 21 – Sao Paulo
Palmeiras 0
Atletico Mineiro 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)

Sep 22 – Rio deJaneiro
Flamengo 2 (Bruno Henrique 21, 38)
Barcelona SC 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)

Semi-Finals – 2nd Leg

Sep 28 – Belo Horizonte
Atletico Mineiro 1 (Vargas 52)
Palmeiras 1 (Dudu 68)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
1-1 on aggregate. Palmeiras win on away goals

Sep 29 – Guayaquil
Barcelona SC 0
Flamengo 2 (Bruno Henrique 18, 50)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Tobar (Chi)
Flamengo win 4-0 on aggregate

2021 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Semi-Finals – 1st Leg

Sep 22 – Braganca Paulista
Red Bull Bragantino 2 (Ytalo 29, Artur 50 pen)
Libertad 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Tello (Arg)

Sep 23 – Montevideo
Penarol 1 (Alvarez Martinez 22)
Athletico Paranaense 2 (Terans 2, Rocha 75)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Haro (Per)

Semi-Finals – 2nd Leg

Sep 29 – Asuncion
Libertad 1 (Melgarejo 52)
Red Bull Bragantino 3 (Cuello 9, 57, Artur 82)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Red Bull Bragantino win 5-1 on aggregate

Sep 30 – Curitiba
Athletico Paranaense 2 (Nikao 24 pen, Rocha 80)
Penarol 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Valenzuela (Ven)
Athletico Paranaense win 4-1 on aggregate

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Emmanuel Petit

Manchester United 0 Arsenal 1

1997-98 Premier League, Old Trafford

1998 was a year that saw Emmanuel Petit's dreams become reality. While a goal in the final of France's World Cup victory was a defining moment for the midfielder, it was Arsenal's 1-0 win against Manchester United at Old Trafford that made him believe everything was possible...

Midfield maestro... Emmanuel Petit

"You have to remember how this story started for Arsenal that season.

A couple of years before, they appointed this French manager who no one had ever heard of in England and all the headlines were: "Arsene who?"

They didn't really have foreign managers in England at the time and that was part of the reason why people didn't believe he could fit into English football. They had a way of doing things, their way. Why did it need to change? Nobody believed this guy Wenger could make it happen.

Even in the season when we won the double, the doubts were there from everyone because we were up against an amazing Manchester United team and they all assumed it would be their title again.

But not this time.

We came out of the Christmas period a long way behind United, with a lot of games in hand, and we needed a lot of wins before we went into this game at Old Trafford.

By the time we got there, we were in a position where we could see them in front of us. Win this one game and everything could change. It was that important.

Arsene had only been at Arsenal for a couple of years, but they knew by that game that he was a threat to them. Alex Ferguson was talking about him in the media and you could see he was worried.

The game with United was a clash of big personalities. They had David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Andy Cole; Roy Keane was injured, but it was still a clash between players who had the personalities to change a game.

Yet we went to Old Trafford believing. Many of this Arsenal team had not won trophies before, but we believed we were good enough.

If we won that game, the title would be in our hands. Marc Overmars scored the goal that changed everything for us as we won 1-0.

Then it was a case of staying focused and trying to win matches and everyone remembers the famous goal Tony Adams scored on the day we won the title against Everton at Highbury.

After that, we won the FA Cup final against Newcastle and then I won the World Cup with France. It's a dream and at the time, maybe I didn't realise what was happening.

You go to the next challenge, not appreciating how amazing it was to achieve these things, but that is the way in sport: always the next challenge.

This is why we see the problems Arsenal have had in recent years and why it ended so badly for Wenger, with fans telling him he had to go.

It's always the next challenge, the next trophy. What has happened before is no longer important.

We should not forget what Arsene did for the Premier League, for Arsenal and for so many players, including me. His legacy will always be there: the Premier League titles, the FA Cups, the unbeaten season – these are amazing achievements for a club that has so many great memories inspired by the vision of this man."

Interview by Kevin Palmer

Manchester United
Manager: Alex Ferguson

Irwin, P. Neville, Berg, Scholes, Cole, Schmeichel, G. Neville, Johnsen, Sheringham, Curtis, Beckham

Parlour, Dixon, Bergkamp, Vieira, Keown, Manninger, Wreh, Petit, Adams, Overmars, Winterburn

Arsenal
Manager: Arsene Wenger

Match-winner...Marc Overmars scores past Peter Schmeichel

> Win this one game and everything could change. It was that important

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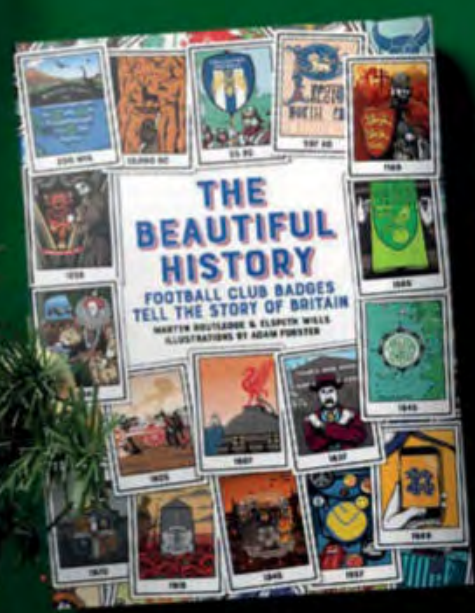
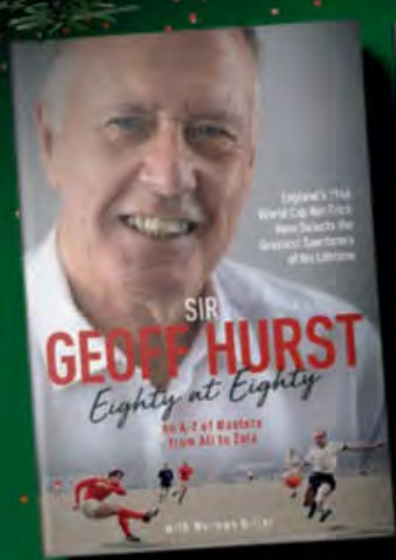
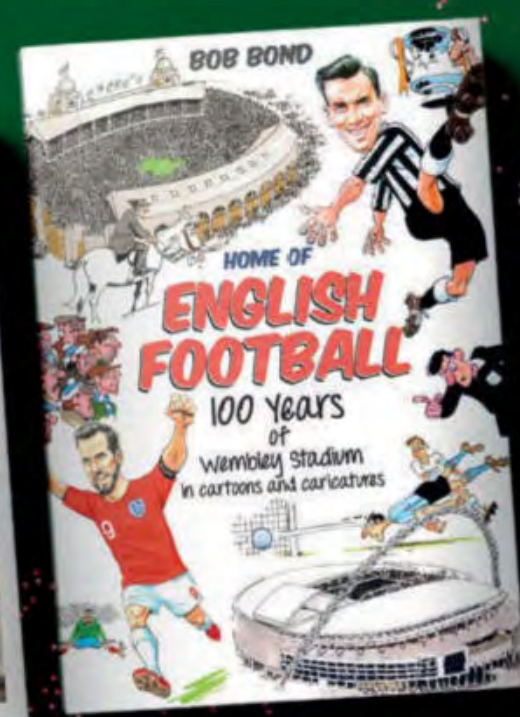
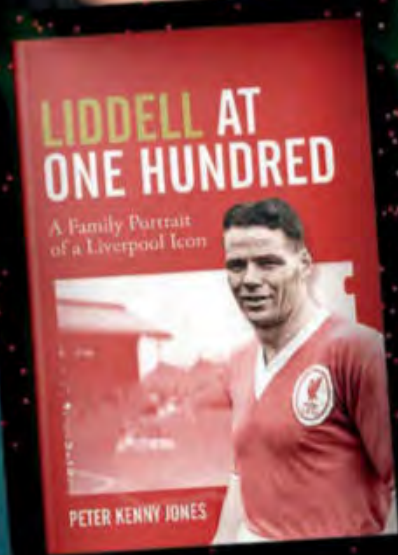


GREAT GIFT IDEAS THIS CHRISTMAS

pitch







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